INFLUENCE OF TEACHER FEEDBACK TECHNIQUES ON STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING SKILLS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Writing is crucial in everyday life and especially in academic life where written work is used to gauge students" ability. Surprisingly, writing is the most difficult skill to learn especially in English as a second language. The English language teacher has to give effective and efficient feedback to students in their writing tasks in order to enable them to achieve competence in their essays. This study investigated the influence of teacher feedback techniques on secondary school students" essay writing skills in Nairobi County. It explored how teacher feedback techniques affect composition writing skills among the form three students in Njiru Sub County.The Transaction model of the communication theory by Barlund (2008) formed the basis of the theoretical framework. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population was form three students and teachers of English in public secondary schools in Njiru Sub County. Purposive sampling technique was used to get a sample of 12 English language teachers. Simple random sampling technique was used to get the sample population of 96 students. The data collection instruments were questionnaires, lesson observation schedule and document analysis of students" marked compositions. The validity and reliability of these instruments were determined by a pilot study as well as the opinion of the supervisors. Data was tabulated, coded and processed using statistical package for social science (SPSS Version 21) software. The quantitative data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages and presented by use of charts, tables and percentages. Qualitative data was thematically analysed. Statistical inference was determined using an alpha=5% ($p<0.05$). The findings of this study established that teachers mainly used question and answer, and lecture method to teach composition writing. Group discussion, brain storming and debate were rarely used; however, the methods have been found to enhance composition writing skills. The study also established that teachers assessed students by giving them a phrase to start or to end a composition with. Methods that highly involve learners such as giving a context, showing a film or giving a picture to create a story were least embraced by teachers in assessment. The results also revealed that grades and codes were the most used feedback strategies by teachers. It was further revealed that students responded to teacher feedback by taking notes and revising work learnt in class. The results also showed that students value teacher feedback. This study established that there is need for consistent use of effective feedback strategies that ensure that the learner is actively involved in the lessons. The study recommends that the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, policy makers and teachers come up with proper strategies for giving feedback to learners in English composition.

Key Words: *teacher feedback techniques, students' essay writing skills, english language, secondary schools, Nairobi County, Kenya*

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is a skill in teaching that is used to evaluate mastery of the subject content. It is one way of engaging the learner to ensure that he/ she is catching up with what is being taught in class. Feedback is a very effective technique in assessment for learning and its absence during teaching rids classroom assessment of its effectiveness in enhancing learning (Sichinga et al 2014). Getting feedback while communicating in class or otherwise ensures that there is effective delivery of knowledge and skills. It may play a very important role in having tabs din knowledge acquisition hence learning. Sarvestani and Pishkar (2015) point out that feedback on ESL students" writing is an essential aspect of improving the students" ability in this skill. They further state that the goal of feedback is to teach skills that will help students to improve their writing proficiency to a point that they recognize what is expected of them. Ogada et al (2012) established that teachers use very few strategies to get feedback from learners. Those teachers have very few strategies that they employ to ensure delivery of the intended content in school. The feedback is however vital for further learning as well as contributing to competence in writing.

The poor performance in the English subject among public schools both nationally and in Njiru Sub-County may be one of the aftermath of poor delivery of content, or rather failure to keep in track of what happens in the classroom during the learning process. There is therefore need to assess whether really there are effective mechanisms employed to assuage this state. The tables below show performance in English in KCSE at national level and in Njiru Sub County:

Table 1: Candidates' overall performance at National level in KCSE in English Paper (101) from 2014 to 2016

Year	Mean Score	Percentage
2014	77.68	38.84%
2015	80.58	40.29%
2016	68.06	34.03 %

Source: KNEC Report 2017

Table 1 shows the overall performance mean score in English subject from the year 2014 to 2016. The KNEC report 2017 says that the overall performance in English language remains unsatisfactory. The means indicate an inconsistent performance that falls short of the ideal mean of 50%. The big question raised in this report is: what could be the problem? Is it inadequate teaching or simply the inability of candidates to perform any better in their written work? Furthermore, the performance in paper 3 (Creative Composition and Essays Based on Set Texts) showed a consistent drop in the mean performance over the last three years.

Table 2: Candidates' performance in English paper 3 (101/3) at KCSE National level from 2014 to 2016

Year	Mean Score	Percentage
2014	19.97	33.28%
2015	19.35	32.25%
2016	18.52	30.86%

Source: KNEC Report 2017

The report lays bare a worrisome trend that must be arrested. Inadequate teaching and lack of practice in writing have been blamed on the poor performance in writing skills (KNEC, 2017). This implies that teachers do not adequately teach all aspects of essay writing and do not give students adequate writing practice. Teachers are advised to use interactive approaches to teach composition writing and improve learners thinking and creative skills.

The poor performance in the English subject among public schools in Njiru Sub-County is evidenced by means that are below average in national examinations. Table 3 presents this information.

Table 3: Students' performance in English at KCSE level in Njiru Sub County from 2013 to 2016

Year	Candidature	Mean Score	Mean Grade
2013	747	4.521	C- (Minus)
2014	830	4.326	D+ (Plus)
2015	1305	3.206	D (Plain)
2016	1428	3.018	D (Plain)

Source: SCD's office Njiru Sub County, 2017

Table 3 clearly indicates that students in Njiru Sub County have been registering below average scores in the last four years. There is need to address this problem. Since writing is a long-life process, the secondary school students should be prepared in such a way that, they are able to meet with challenges that await them in colleges and thereafter in their career, as they will be expected to express their ideas in writing.

Writing has been regarded as a technical skill that cannot be acquired by chance but through instruction. This means that the writing skill requires instructional methods, teaching strategies and feedback strategies that a classroom teacher should effectively employ (Murunga, 2013).

Feedback is a crucial aspect in the writing process which plays a central role in learning this skill. Karim and Nassaji (2013), observe that through feedback, learners come to distinguish for themselves whether they are performing well or not. Getchell, (2011) argues that when students are not performing well, further feedback helps them to take corrective action about their writing in order to improve it and reach an acceptable level of performance. Hosseiny, (2014) argues that

feedback serves as a good indication of how EFL students are progressing in learning the written language and, therefore, assists the teachers in diagnosing and assessing their students" problematic areas. Once the student"s weakness is identified, then corrections can easily be done.

Feedback is considered an important enabling strategy for ESL writers. In an ESL classroom, teacher feedback means a variety of responses, mainly focusing on lexical, grammatical and content errors. These are identified by the teachers as they mark the students work with the intention of helping the students to improve their writing. It helps students to gain benefits from sufficient writing practice and revisions on their drafts to produce a final piece of writing. Students use teacher feedback to identify areas that need to be improved in their writing. This feedback could either be oral or written, presented inform of a praise, advice or criticism.

Teacher feedback plays a vital role in ESL writing since writing is the most difficult task that English language learners face as they have to master not only grammatical rules but also writing conventions in a particular culture such as organization of a paper, word choice, sentence pattern and ideas. Teacher feedback can help students become aware of errors and other writing problems which they failed to notice when they wrote their drafts. Through teacher feedback the student writers learn where they have confused the reader by not supplying enough information or by using incorrect grammar. Students" learning therefore, depend on the kind of feedback methods that the teacher provides and on the teacher"s ability to encourage the students to continue working on their draft (Coutts, 2015).

Teachers often spend a lot of time reading through their students" work and giving detailed comments in the hope that their students will understand them and correct their mistakes. If students view feedback negatively then it will lower their desire to write and eventually kill their creativity. According to Sarvestani and Pishkar (2015), feedback is vital in helping students to improve their writing skills. Clear feedback may create a positive attitude in the learners and encourage them to continue writing. This study therefore, explored the methods used by English language teachers to teach composition writing skills, investigate methods used by English language teachers to assess composition writing, establish the strategies used by English language teachers to give feedback to student writers, investigate students" perceptions to teacher feedback in their compositions and establish the influence of teacher feedback strategies in attaining competence in essay writing.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching of composition writing is important for it lays foundations for future language development. Teaching of English writing is intricate, especially when the latter is a second language. A study carried out on criterion-referenced tests based on developed English literacy requirements showed that majority of the learners had not attained the desired English literacy competence levels to express themselves in writing (Gathumbi et al 2013). Though we continue to observe poor performance in English composition in the country, few studies have been

focused on why this performance is low while laying emphasis on what goes on in the classroom during the learning process. In the Kenyan education system, English is a medium of instruction from primary four, through secondary school to universities and colleges (KNEC, 2006). Despite the value attached to the language, poor performance trend has been noted. KNEC reports show that learners lack creativity in composition writing and other students write memorized pieces, which are irrelevant to the input leads (KNEC, 2014). All these are what is based on to form policy in the educational sector. This is summative evaluation that may not really show where the problem is in as far as the process of attainment of the skills is concerned. English is taught and examined in three separate papers: oral skills, comprehension and grammar, and creative composition and essays based on set text. The KNEC Report (2017) raises concern over the declining performance in English paper three among secondary schools over the last three years. This may be due to the fact that rarely do students get clear feedback in the course of learning. Little is gained from summative evaluations that serve as the only feedback, which ironically comes at the tail end of the learning period. Many studies have reported the importance of feedback in teaching and learning process. However, few studies have been dwelt on the effect of feedback techniques for instruction during teaching of English writing. There is need to relook at how the writing skill is taught by the English language teachers, the mode of marking these compositions and how the English language teachers use feedback to reinforce instruction while teaching English writing. The results in Njiru Sub County have shown a decline in performance from the year 2013 to 2016 (Njiru Sub County Director‟s Office, 2017). The mean scores are below 6.0. This performance helps gather valuable information on how feedback-teaching techniques would affect competence in English writing. In this light, this study sought to investigate the influence of teacher feedback techniques on students‟ essay writing skills in English language in secondary schools in Njiru Sub County, Nairobi County.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To establish the methods used by the English language teachers to teach composition writing.
2. To explore methods used by the English language teachers to assess composition writing.
3. To establish strategies used by the English language teachers to give feedback to student writers.
4. To investigate students‟ perception to teacher feedback in their compositions.
5. To establish the influence of the teacher feedback techniques in attaining competence in composition writing.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Performance in English Language Essay Writing

Teaching and learning English as a second language involves four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, the second language learners find writing as the most

difficult skill to master in their learning process (Sermsook et al, 2017). Written communication skills are central to learning whether in academic life, in the work place, or in personal life since they offer a powerful advantage in a world in which people must constantly learn new information (Duignan, 2012).

Writing is of great importance in our personal and academic life because it makes information available and long lasting in that, written work can be read and reread over time. Writing is a tool for the creation of ideas and the consolidation of the linguistic system by using it for the communicative objectives in an interactive way (Elashri, 2013). Writing is a successful tool for the transmission of ideas from an addresser to an addressee through a text. This exchange of information becomes a powerful means to motivate and encourage the development of language skills. Writing is one of the language skills that enable a learner to think critically and creatively as they respond to academic discipline. It is a lifelong process and part of personal development whose usefulness stretches beyond the classroom (KICD, 2006). A good writer should think in a clear and organized manner in order to present ideas logically. Writing consists of several processes: planning, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. However, in writing, students often hand in the first draft of their writing as their final product (Hoogeveen and van Gelderen, 2013). They do not produce multiple drafts of their essays. English is considered an international language with over 1.5 billion speakers over the world (Pugazhenthi, 2012). English in Kenya is a medium of instruction in schools starting from primary school, class four up to the universities (KNEC, 2010). It is also the official language. English is also a compulsory and examinable subject both in Kenyan primary and secondary schools. The English textbooks and the syllabus have been designed to integrate the four basic language skills.

The emphasis is on both spoken and written communication as reflected in the objectives of English Language Teaching (ELT) at secondary school level as stipulated in the secondary English syllabus (KICD, 2005). By the end of the secondary school course, the learners are expected to be able to use a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary correctly, communicate appropriately in functional and creative writing and think creatively and critically.

The Ministry of Education in Kenya stipulates that English must be taught using the integrated approach. This involves teaching English language and literature in English as one subject in the school curriculum. The integration aims at strengthening and enriching each entity. Through exposure to literature, the learners are expected to improve their language skills. They are to not only enrich their vocabulary skills but also learn to use language in a variety of ways. Similarly, an improved knowledge of the language should enhance the learners‟ appreciation of literary material. The integrated approach also means that no language skill should be taught in isolation. Listening, speaking, reading and writing skills should complement each other. According to KICD (2002), teaching language structures in isolation is not only boring but also tends to produce learners who lack communicative competence.

The Kenya National Examination Council (KNEC) tests the learners at the end of the four-year course on both English language and literature. This is done by testing the writing skills in three different ways. First, the learner"s ability to write accurately using the right format and style is examined in functional writing. Secondly, learner"s creativity and imagination are tested in creative writing where he is expected to write a story as guided. Thirdly, the learner is expected to write essays based on set texts. This is where literally skills are tested in writing. The learner must have proper mastery of the set text in order to give the right content. Thus, the integrated approach echoes what Richards and Rodgers (2001) term the whole language approach. All the English language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing must be integrated in teaching and learning.

English has been associated with power, prestige, progress, success and achievement. Though it has been accorded a prestigious position, learners still have trouble while learning it and writing in it. Thus, the mastery of English is crucial for satisfactory examination performance and communication in official cycles. However, this is not the case with the secondary school leavers in Kenya. The KNEC Report (2017) raises concern over the declining performance in English subject among secondary schools over the years.

The report lays bare a worrisome trend that must be arrested. Inadequate teaching and lack of practice in writing have been blamed on the poor performance in writing skills (KNEC, 2017). This implies that teachers do not adequately teach all aspects of essay writing and do not give students adequate writing practice. Teachers are advised to use interactive approaches to teach composition writing and improve learners thinking and creative skills.

In the same breath, even with good methods of instruction, we need an elaborate feedback strategy that would show where the problem is in the formative stages of learning rather than at the summative stage. This would inform intervention measures that would assuage the situation and point to better performance. This study therefore explores this trend.

Methods of Teaching Essays

Writing is a skill which demands that students plan and organize their imagination clearly and in sequential order to fulfill the essence of writing. Composition teaching and writing is more difficult than teaching and practicing other language skills (Akinwamide, 2012). Previous works have shown that writing is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of a number of variables simultaneously. By implication, it means the writer must plan the content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and formation of ideas (Bereiter and Scardamalia, 2013).

All physically and mentally normal people learn to speak a language. Yet all people have to be taught how to write (Aitchison, 2012). Hence, the teaching and learning of writing should be organized and accompanied with concerted effort of the language teacher and careful approach of the students.

The technical nature of writing and the need to use writing to express a writer's thought in a logical and coherent manner call for it to be taught well (Fortun, 2010). All the other macro-skills of language are taught without facing serious challenges on how to coordinate ideas, thoughts and the application of the mechanics as it is required in writing skill. Good plans must be made by the teacher so that the writing class does not become a source of frustration to both students and teachers. The students are confronted with what is expected of them by conventions of written English to express themselves at a far more precise level of grammatical accuracy and rhetorical organization and so if care is not taken, they become confused and bored with composition writing. This is why the teacher must decide which approach he must employ to get the students along.

The first popular approach in the teaching of writing is the traditional product-oriented approach, which is also known as „Models Approach‟. This approach focuses on the product - the written text that serves as the model for the learner. It was believed that if a model text written by an accomplished and competent writer is given to students to read, the students imbibe all the good qualities of writing and thus become good writers. This approach emphasizes students' exposure to written sentences and paragraphs whether emphasizing grammatical roles or rhetorical patterns.

The proponents of the Product Approach hold the believe that students can learn how to write with minimal error when they are given the composition of a good writer to study before embarking on their own writing (Oguta, 2015). Eslami (2014) sees the product approach following a linear pattern. The primary goal of this approach is an error -free coherent text.

In this approach, students would be given writing exercises that would reinforce language structure that they have learned through the imitation and manipulation of grammatical patterns. Examples of such writing tasks are shown in controlled compositions in which students would be given a paragraph and asked to perform substitutions, expansions or completion exercises.

The second approach is known as the process-oriented approach. According to Coutts, (2015) process writing involves five stages: pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. Pre-writing is the planning and idea gathering stage. Drafting refers to time spend composing a rough draft. Revising is a process of improving the draft by rereading and changing the writing according to feedback given. Editing involves correcting mechanical errors. Publishing is the final stage or product.

Odima (2015) investigated the use of process approach in teaching writing skills and observed that most teachers find it difficult to teach writing. They used poor approaches and a majority of them lectured students on how to write. Teachers simply gave students topics and asked them to write compositions. Other studies have reported that English composition writing requires a mastery of grammatical rules that can be achieved through instructional process (Söllwander, 2016 and Jerotich, 2017)). Furthermore, if the general objective of teaching English is to be met,

learners need to learn not only the effective use of main grammatical structures like sentences, clauses, phrases and words, but also the ability to write logically and coherently. Some studies have also shown that a good writer should observe patterns of word order and word structure, demonstrate a good command of sentence structure and preserve coherence both within and in between sentences to give meaning to text (Odima, 2015).

In addition, it has been shown that, feedback is helpful in encouraging students not to consider what they write as a final product and in helping them to write multiple drafts and to revise their writing several times in order to produce a much improved piece of writing. Feedback can be adopted and benefited from in a teaching situation where rewriting is encouraged (Quinton and Smallbone, 2010).

Tootkaboni and Khatib (2014) explained that with the teacher"s corrective feedback in writing classes, the student will be able to understand the mistakes or errors he has done, learn from them, and his ability to write accurately will be improved. Temmerman (2017) notes that, with the absence of feedback, students can become unmotivated and lose the sense of how they are doing and which aspects of their writing they should pay more attention to. Lee (2008) argues that their efforts may be misdirected and they may gain an inaccurate impression of their performance in the writing skill. Moreover, Eisner (2017)) argues that lack of feedback may also create the assumption among students that they have communicated their meaning and, therefore, they do not perceive the need to revise the substance of their texts. Thus, feedback is a vital aspect of writing.

Generally, secondary school teachers would focus on functional writing and compositions based on set texts. They won"t focus much on creative writing since they assume the learner has gained sufficient knowledge on this skill at primary level. Hayland (2015) observes that teacher corrections of errors in student"s essay serve as examples for writers, in reality; most students benefit little from the corrections because the students treat work handed in as final products rather than as a stage in the process of improvement or completion.

Several studies have focused on strategies teachers use to help alleviate this cancer of poor performance in English writing. A study on text-oriented teaching of writing was reported to be ineffective due to lack of variety of texts at the teachers" disposal. There was also the challenge of the big student to teacher ratio (Onchera and Manyasi, 2013). Other studies have reported that student teachers are not comprehensively prepared for effective instruction in writing at secondary level. Moreover, it has been observed that student teachers do not use varied strategies when writing essays (Manyasi, 2013). The most commonly documented strategies in Kenyan schools for teaching composition writing are: discussion, repetition, guided writing and cooperative teaching (Ogada et al, 2012). All these have been employed at high school level with no remarkable impact on performance. There is need to incorporate a variety of strategies for teaching of composition writing in order to reverse the performance trends reported.

Assessing Students' Essays

Assessment is a crucial part of the writing process. According to Arslan and Şahin-Kızıl (2010), assessment provides guidance for revision, feedback to both students and teachers that they can use to improve teaching and learning of writing skills. Assessment of students" writing abilities is an integral part of effective teaching and learning. A teacher should always engage the students in frequent assessment to gauge their writing skills.

There are three types of assessment that help the teacher to assess students" competence in writing skills. The first is diagnostic assessment, which helps the teacher to know students" entry behavior before planning their instruction. This test helps the teacher to cater for individual students" differences. The second is formative assessment. According to Noyce and Hickey (2011) formative assessment is the process of monitoring student knowledge and understanding during instruction in order to give useful feedback and make timely changes in instruction to ensure maximal student growth. Formative assessment is used by the teacher for daily tasks of planning instruction, giving feedback and monitoring students" progress in the writing skills. It promotes student learning since it involves many different tasks which elicit evidence of learning. Third, is the summative assessment which is the periodic formal assessment for grouping, grading and reporting. Summative assessment as a summary of what a child can do, knows and understands that is usually made at transition point such as entry to school, change of class and at the end of a key stage (Mogere, 2013).

A study carried out by Okwara (2012) on factors related to achievement in written English composition among secondary school students, the findings showed that lack of adequate assessment can easily affect students" writing competence. It was recommended that teachers provide adequate practice to students on essay writing. It is important for a teacher to assess and correct students" essays. Writing exercises are vital in assessing the learners" nature and develop their competence in language use. Without practice and proper teacher guidance, the students will not achieve coherence and competence in writing skills.

Concept of Teacher Feedback

Irons (2008) define feedback as any information, process or activity that affords or accelerates students learning based on comments relating to assessment or activity. Teacher feedback is regarded as a main requirement for improvement in students" essay writing. Mottet (2008) defines teacher feedback as feedback from a source to a recipient in the form of information about the correctness, accuracy, or appropriateness of recipients past performance.

Archer, (2010) carried out a study in Spain that revealed that many students greatly value teacher feedback and consistently rate it more highly than alternative forms of feedback. Similarly, teacher feedback has been observed as having a positive effect on the accuracy of the target form when participants are asked to revise their writings. Therefore, it is more effective on process writing. A more robust study by Azmat and Iriberri (2010) among high school students provides

a conceptualization of teacher feedback in their research. They grouped teacher comments into three categories: judgmental comments, reader response comments, and coaching. Judgmental comments evaluate the student"s writing in terms of what is good, what needs further work or what can be written better according to the teacher. There are four characteristics of good comments: focused applicable, clear and encouraging (Humphries et al, 2014).

Reader response comments offer the teacher"s reaction as a reader to the student"s writing and describe his/her experiences while reading the student"s work. The comments are highly personal and characterized by the use of 1st person statement. Coaching comments advice students on ways to develop their writing, and they tend to be facilitative, which means that the comments act as guides for students to consider the features of their writing, such as word choice, sentence formation, organization and writing style. They also encourage the students to look at their writing critically.

A major problem experienced by English language teachers is the presence of errors in ESL writing (Williams, 2005). Students often make errors on form and content. The teacher feedback therefore, is mainly focused on these two kinds of errors. The feedback on form involves teacher"s outright correction of surface errors. Here, the teacher indicates the place and type of errors without correction. Thus, the teacher indicates by underlining the presence of errors only. On the other hand, content feedback involves the teacher"s suggestion for improvements in future rewrites. This research advocates for teachers to combine a variety of feedback techniques in guiding students in essay writing. Supporting this suggestion is a study by Razali and Jupri (2014) who assert that combination of a variety of feedback techniques can result to satisfying improvements in composition writing.

Strategies Used to Give Feedback

In writing classrooms teachers adopt a variety of strategies to assess on students" essays. Almasi and Tibrizi (2016) identifies two common categories of feedback that teachers give on students" written essays namely: direct and indirect feedback. They carried out a study to compare the effectiveness of direct and indirect teacher feedback in Iranian students. The results indicated that the group receiving direct feedback performed better than those who received indirect feedback. Westmacott (2017) states that indirect feedback is valuable to students in improving their writing proficiency. The study showed positive improvement for learners receiving indirect feedback. These strategies therefore, have to be dictated by the nature of the learner and the writing ability of the learner.

Written Comments on Students' Essays: Many teachers feel they must write substantial comments on student essays to provide reader reactions to students" effort, to help them improve as writers to justify the grade they have been given. Formative assessment in terms of written comments can act as a tool for learning, contributing to the process and outcomes of learning. A closer look at students" experiences of each form of assessment reveals interesting differences

(Weurlander et al, (2012). Teachers should however avoid writing inefficient and ineffective comments by responding to the written paper as a reader but not a grammarian or a grade giver.

Teacher comments play three roles: praise, criticism and advice. Praise is a positive comment on learners writing. It helps to reinforce appropriate language behaviors and foster students'' self-esteem especially for less able writers. Hayland (2005) defines criticism as an expression of dissatisfaction or negative comment. Sincere praise is used to soften both criticism and suggestions. The three forms are used together to make teacher feedback most effective. Razali and Jupri (2014) argue that, praise, criticism and advice can be used appropriately to achieve competence in essay writing skills.

Grades of Ranking Students' Essays: Teachers often use grades to give feedback on students'' essays. The teacher should state clearly the criteria used to come up with these grades. Teachers normally use grade A –E to show students'' progress in writing tasks. A research by Black and Williams show that grades can distract students from acting on comments. Students focus on their ego rather than the work. The most proficient students look at the high grade and decide that they do not act on the comment to improve their work. A student with low grade will feel unmotivated to follow up and improve his essay. The low grade according to the student is a mark of failure. It is advisable to the teacher to give the marking criteria before the task. For example: format, quality of ideas, organization of these ideas into linked paragraphs, ability to use impersonal style involving a range of complex sentences and connectors, giving opinions and conclusion. Students should be given the marking format:

A- Very good. Good spellings and punctuation. Effort shown. Best work.

B- Good. Grammar is satisfactory. Commitment to work. There is room for improvement.

C- Satisfactory. Completed work adequately. Made some effort. There is room for improvement.

D- Unsatisfactory. Work skimpy and rushed. Weak. General lack of effort.

E- Poor. Untidy and careless grammar. Incomplete work. Weak. Very little effort.

Codes Used to Correct Students' Essays: Codes are symbols that teachers use to communicate to the learner on their strong and weak areas in their essays. Using codes usually cuts down on marking time and focuses on helping students to improve their work. Ogalo and Gathumbi (2011) suggest that in order to pre-occupy the learner in doing self-correction, teachers can use a certain correction code with symbols for the different types of mistakes such as poor sentence and paragraph organization, omitting needed information, misuse of sentence linkers and idea connectors, tense and ambiguity. The codes need to be clearly defined so that both teachers and students understand them. The teachers need to decide how marking of spelling, grammar and punctuation should be carried out and inform their learners about this. Research indicates that too many corrections will discourage students from writing.

Codes used by teachers include ticks for correct points, slashes for strong points, a question mark for cannot understand, ww for wrong word, sp for incorrect spelling among others. The feedback styles adopted by the teacher should be sensitive to the individual needs of the student and reference a skill or a particular knowledge. The teacher should limit the amount of feedback given by concentrating on one ability instead of commenting on the entire paper. In a study in the USA, the researchers treated one group with comments to indicate faults, one group with comments designed to correct errors. The last group received remarks to foster thinking which contained the teacher"s comments on the content and on the impact of the essays on the readers. Their experiment directed students to write a sample essay and to complete a short questionnaire to measure their attitudes toward writing at the beginning and at the end of the term. Later, the essays were scored holistically and were also analyzed for possible lexical and syntax errors. They then concluded that it does not matter what the teachers write because students do not read the comments anyway, so the effect of the comments is minimal (Ferris, 2006).

Types of Teacher Feedback

It is important for the teacher to note three things while giving feedback on errors. First, that overcorrection can have demoralizing effect. Second, making errors is a natural and important aspect of the learning process and repeating previous mistakes is common in ESL writing. Third, to get know how to balance between being accurate and sensitive, while giving feedback. Teacher feedback types to be discussed in this study are verbal and written feedback.

Teacher Verbal Feedback: Verbal feedback refers to the communication between the student writer and the teacher by the word of mouth. This form of feedback may be given as the teacher circulates around the room while students are writing. It may also be a request by a student for a teacher"s input or it may be a teacher"s commendation on students writing as they draft or revise their writing. Verbal feedback may also be given in a student-teacher conference. Students may sign up to meet their teachers on regular basis. A comment on students writing such as "see me" will create a one –on –one meeting with the teacher. Cepni (2016) says that student- teacher conferences provide individualized attention for students and opportunities to gather information about students" thinking and writing processes. The oral feedback gives an opportunity for both teacher and the learner to clear their doubts.

Sobhani and Tayebipous (2015) further states that the dialogue between student and the teacher help each to learn something from the other. The student may ask for help in a particular area or what effect the writing may have on the teacher as a reader. On the other hand, the teacher may ask about the students" goals, their impressions of the strongest parts of their writing and their thoughts on what they have learned through writing a particular composition. Irons (2008) states that in providing a good verbal feedback, the teacher needs to consider the clarity of feedback, especially how to indicate the ways in which students can improve and develop for the future so that the students get the point of what actually the teacher says and to get the positive influence of the feedback. Students make mistakes while writing and it is the role of the teacher to correct

the mistake. Verbal feedback provides immediate feedback to the writer. The challenge posed by this form of feedback is lack of time to meet the students. However, the teacher should create time to meet the students for guidelines in writing.

Teacher Written Feedback: Teacher's written feedback is the most widely used form of feedback that students receive on their written work. However, it is a complex area, and several studies have dealt with it from different angles. Clement et al (2010) for example, have investigated the methods teachers utilize to respond to their students" written work. In most ESL classrooms, teacher feedback often takes the form of written comments on the students writing. These comments rarely have as great an impact as teachers intend. This is because students view their writing as a final product when they hand it in for marking.

Almasi and Tabrizi (2016) conducted a study to compare effectiveness of direct and indirect teacher feedback. They found out that Iranian EFL students receiving direct feedback performed better than the other two groups who received indirect feedback. In a study based in Britain, it was observed that most of the feedback students received was on the surface level. It only considered grammar aspects, spelling and punctuation. The researchers concluded that middle school students who received content level feedback increased the length and improved the quality of their essays, whereas middle school students who only received surface level written feedback showed improvement in aspects related to punctuation, grammar and spelling.

Teacher written feedback can be classified as direct or indirect. Direct feedback refers to teacher"s correction of errors whereas indirect feedback mentions the teacher"s indication of errors by underlining, highlighting or coding them and then letting learners do the correction (Bitchener, 2018). Direct feedback occurs when the teacher picks out errors and gives the correct forms, whereas indirect correction refers to situations when the teacher marks that errors have been made but does not supply the correct forms, requiring the learners to diagnose and correct their errors. She says that coded feedback refers to instances when the teacher points out the locations of errors are marked with codes such as T for wrong tense. Uncoded feedback implies situations when the teacher circles errors, underlines errors or puts a tally in the margin to offer learner a chance to diagnose and correct errors (Dowden et al, 2013). Almasi and Tabrizi (2016) conducted a study to compare effectiveness of direct and indirect teacher feedback. They found out that Iranian EFL students receiving direct feedback performed better than the other two groups who received indirect feedback. Therefore, direct feedback can be of great help to learners if given with the teacher"s guidance.

Challenges Associated with Feedback

Student writing is a widely used method to give feedback to students. However, teacher feedback communicates to students what needs to be revised or changed in their writing for the next time. There are three problems that possibly result from teacher comments on student papers. The first problem is that students think some changes are unnecessary for their writing, and therefore, they

make them just because the teacher suggests the changes (Ogada and Masebe 2012). This may result in an essay that presents what the teacher requires the student to say, rather than demonstrating the student"s own words. Sometimes feedback may not be very clear to students. As a result, the student sometimes cannot distinguish the most important problem from the less important problems in his/her paper. Secondly, Sommers also says that many teachers" comments are not specific for a particular text. That is to say, teacher feedback could be more helpful when it is specific to the text it is dealing with. She also points out that most teacher feedbacks are not explicit and directive enough. However, there are a large number of studies demonstrating the efficacy of teacher feedback. Effective feedback has four basic characteristics: focused, applicable, clear, and encouraging.

According to Clarke (2000) marking students" work provides valuable personal feedback to the students about their performance and related improvement. She argues that teacher feedback recognizes the student"s achievement and clearly indicate the next steps that students need to progress. Teacher feedback should also relate to the planned learning goals, be clear in meaning, and indicate the next steps needed for students. Students must be given time to absorb and act upon or consolidate the feedback comments. A response to feedback should be expected as long as the teacher"s comments are brief, clearly written and easy for the learner to understand. Teachers of English often use codes and grades not familiar to the student. The student then is unable to interpret the message the teacher wants to communicate. Therefore, teacher feedback strategies should be made clear to the learner so that the learner may understand what the teacher means when he/she uses a code or grade. If the strategies are not clear or even familiar to the learner then the feedback will not be beneficial to the student (Kay and LeSage 2009). It is therefore incumbent upon teachers of English to purpose and plan for strategies that will clearly have pointers to whether students grasp the content and the students need to be up to date with the intentions of the teachers on this front.

Students' Perception to Feedback

There has been a growing literature on students" preferences, reactions and perceptions regarding teacher feedback. Since feedback has been identified as a key strategy in learning and teaching, it"s also vital to know about the student perception about the strategies used. Gamlem and Smith (2011) conducted a study in Norway among lower secondary students to establish the student perceptions about teacher feedback strategies. The results of the study indicate varying results of how both boys and girls respond to assessment. Some have a negative attitude towards the strategies while others support the tools employed. Razali and Jupri (2014) have suggested that a mixture of praise, criticism and suggestions may be most beneficial. Briefly, prior research suggests that student characteristics (for example confidence, proficiency) as well as characteristics of teacher feedback (for example, criticism, praise, authority, specificity) influence whether and how well students utilize teacher feedback. It"s therefore vital to carefully pilot the strategies employed in order to achieve any results. This study hence looked at the situation in Kenya and evaluated whether it gave same or varying results.

Influence of Teacher Feedback Techniques in Attaining Competence in Composition Writing

Feedback may be defined as information describing students" performance in a given activity that is intended to guide their future performance in that same or a related activity (Ramani and Krackov, 2012). Feedback links the teaching and assessment roles of teachers and demonstrates their commitment to the learners (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). It is widely recognized that feedback is an important part of the learning cycle, but both students and teachers frequently express disappointment and frustration in relation to the conduct of the feedback process. Students may complain that feedback on assessment is unhelpful or unclear, and sometimes even demoralizing (Temmerman, 2017). Additionally, students sometimes report that they are not given guidance as to how to use feedback to improve subsequent performance. Even worse, students sometimes note that the feedback is provided too late to be of any use or relevance at all (Quinton and Smallbone, 2010).

Feedback is what informs improvement in instruction in the classroom. The term feedback can apply to a number of classroom situations and procedures, but here it refers to a range of techniques employed by the teacher to facilitate responses from the students to an exercise or task (Skinner, 2016). Common feedback techniques include: peer-assessment tools, group discussion, give out 'Post -it' slips for students to label, written responses and questionnaires. Feedback should be given in a timely manner. When feedback is given immediately after showing proof of learning, the student responds positively and remembers the experience about what is being learned in a confident manner. It allows students to submit their work and then have a set of their classmates anonymously give feedback. The teacher has to often test his techniques of instruction in order to diagnose his effectiveness.

As a feedback technique, group discussion has distinctive strengths: it gives opportunities for exploring issues in depth, weighing the significance of points raised and clarifying students' suggestions. If it is to work well, however, it needs a clear framework or structure which will both help to ensure that key issues are addressed and encourage everyone to make contributions of their own.

A refreshingly different way of getting pointers as to how classes are progressing is to give out 'Post -it' slips for students to label with three simple headings. You then ask the students to write below each heading what they would like you to stop, start and continue doing in tutorials or practical during the next part of the course. The 'Post-it' notes can be displayed immediately on a board, wall, or the back of a door, and after they have been collected up you can group similar comments together to identify the main themes.

Questionnaires are of course a third option, but a light touch is essential, for two reasons. First, questionnaires may look straightforward, but in reality, designing and processing a good questionnaire calls for considerable effort and expertise. Second, feedback questionnaires are in

such widespread use that some students are used to them and eventually dismiss them (Gal and Gal, 2013).

While students would feel put on the spot if asked directly, their written responses are more likely to give insights into their experiences and what they are taking from them. A similar approach can also be used to get feedback at the end of a course or part-course. Students can be asked to indicate which areas they would like to get feedback on or which challenges they experience with the feedback provided (Krueger and Casey, 2014).

Composition writing has over the years recorded poor performances in national exams (Kremer and Holla, 2009). It"s important to remedy this situation by employing strategies that would reverse this trend for better performance. A good teacher feedback must put into consideration the student"s unique needs. Feedback techniques have been used elsewhere in improving writing (Hewings and Coffin, 2006). Most of the studies that have been mentioned have generally look at how, feedback has been employed in general teaching and learning. However, no one has specifically looked at how the feedback mechanisms have been used to teach English composition. Furthermore, none had dwelt on how to utilize these strategies for competence in English composition teaching. This study also explored all these in schools in Njiru Sub County.

Factors that Influence Quality of Feedback

Some attempt has been made to explore the factors that influence the quality of feedback. Ramani and Krakow (2012) have isolated some of the factors; they include: being too general, being judgmental, giving gratuitous information, not soliciting person"s ideas, and giving feedback in inappropriate places. A number of researchers concur that the timing of feedback has the most considerable influence on the effectiveness of feedback. It has been reported in a study in Australia that learners wanted early feedback because it gave them greater opportunity to improve their performance (Wulf et al 2010). Similarly, Archer (2010) discovered that feedback given immediately after the behaviour was more effective than delayed feedback. The study was a departure from the previous ones as it investigated the influence of teachers" gender, school type, learner"s level of achievement, and difficulty level of the questions on the quality of feedback in mathematics classes in senior secondary schools in Gaborone.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Orodho (2004) a descriptive survey research design enables the researcher to collect information about people"s opinions, attitude or any of the variety of education or social issues that affect them. The design was used since it enabled the researcher to collect information from the respondents on the teacher feedback techniques in students" English language essay writing in public secondary schools. According to Kothari (2004) survey design allows for the use of multiple sources of data

collection (triangulation). The design was used because it enabled the researcher to collect information by use of questionnaires, interview schedules and corrected student‟s composition. The design also allowed for the ability to obtain both qualitative and quantitative data on teacher feedback techniques in students‟ English language essay writing in public secondary schools.

Variables

The independent variables of the study were methods of teaching essay writing skills in English language, methods used to assess English language essays, types of teacher feedback and strategies for giving feedback. The intervening variables were students‟ entry behavior and student‟s perception to teacher feedback while motivation acted as a moderating variable. The dependent variable was competence in essay writing.

Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Njiru Sub-County, Nairobi County. Njiru Sub-County lies in the Eastern part of Nairobi City. It borders Machakos County to the East, Kasarani and Thika Sub-Counties to the North and Embakasi Sub-County to the South. The study focused on public secondary schools, which were randomly selected within the Sub-County. The Sub-County was chosen for the study because of its consistent low performance in KCSE English examinations (Nairobi County Director‟s Report, 2013).

Target Population

The target population for the study comprised of 10 public secondary schools, 960 Form three students and 24 English language teachers in the ten public secondary schools in Njiru Sub-County (Nairobi County Director of Education, 2014). Thus, the target population for the study was 984 respondents. The target population comprised of form three students and their English language teachers. Form three students were selected because they have had more exposure to essay writing skills compared to form twos and form ones. Form fours could not participate in the study because they were preparing for KCSE examinations.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

Stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select schools to be included in the study from public schools in the sub-County. The schools were stratified into girls only, boys only and mixed. The researcher also looked into the nature of the school whether boarding or day and their performance. According to Kombo and Tromp (2006) stratification ensures that certain sub-groups in the population are represented in the sample in the proportion of their numbers in the population of the study. Students were classified into three categories: above average, average and below average. This was to help get a variety of teacher comments based on student‟s writing ability. According to Kothari (2006) the technique produces estimates of overall population parameters with greater precision and ensures a more representative sample is

derived from a relatively homogeneous population. According to Kothari (2006) a sample of 10% to 30% is appropriate for descriptive studies. The study selected a sample of 96 students which was 10% of the entire form three students‟ population and purposively selected 12 English teachers in ten public secondary schools in Njiru Sub-county Nairobi County. The sample of was 108 respondents drawn from 5 schools selected for the study.

Research Instruments

The researcher used questionnaires, observation schedules and corrected student compositions as the research instruments. Primary data was obtained using questionnaires while secondary data was obtained from reading past research, checking the internet, books and journals. Questionnaires containing both open and closed ended questions were used to collect data from teachers and students. The questionnaire enabled the researcher to preserve the respondents‟ anonymity hence making it possible to elicit their responses. It also saves time and allows greater uniformity in the way questions are asked and hence greater compatibility in the responses. According to Kothari (2004) a questionnaire gives respondents freedom to express their views or opinions and to make suggestions. The questionnaire provided information on demographic data, methods used in teaching essays, strategies for giving feedback and suggestions for improving feedback in writing skills. The researcher analysed corrected students‟ compositions for types of teacher feedback used. The types of errors identified by the teacher in the compositions were put into various categories and their frequency of occurrence noted. The use of feedback strategies such as written comments, codes and grades were also identified and their frequency noted. Golafsheni (2005) classifies observation into participant and non- participant observation. The study used non-participant observation. Mogere (2014) states that non-participant observation allows the researcher observe the lesson without taking part in the teaching and learning process. This allows the teacher to execute his or her lesson without interference from the researcher. Thus, the researcher had an opportunity to concentrate on the essay teaching lesson. The observation schedule acted as a guide for the researcher to obtain information on methods used to teach essay writing, nature of verbal feedback and assessment strategies. The observation schedule has an advantage of providing first- hand information for the study. It helped the researcher with data to approve or disapprove the responses given in the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Kombo and Tromp (2006) define data collection procedure as the gathering of information to serve or prove some facts. Permission was sought from Kenyatta University, Graduate school, where she was given an introduction letter. Authorization was also obtained from National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI), the research Permit is attached at appendix G. Permission from the County Commissioner and the County Director of Education, Nairobi County was obtained as attached in appendix F. Informed consent was also obtained from all the study participants. They were assured of the confidentiality. The selected teachers of English language were subjected to a questionnaire by the researcher. They were to

respond on composition teaching and assessment methods in English, strategies used in giving feedback and suggestions for improving teacher feedback in English language composition writing. The questionnaires were administered to the sampled students at different days in all the five schools within a period of one week. The questionnaires were administered assisted by English language teachers in each school. Any student with a difficulty of interpreting the questions was assisted by the researcher. English language teachers collected the end term compositions they had marked for form three students in five schools. They were analyzed according to types of errors made (whether grammatical, lexical or content errors), codes/grades and nature of comment using the KNEC analysis schedule. Arrangements were made with the English subject teachers to attend their essay writing lessons. They agreed upon the specific date and time for teaching composition skills. The researcher then attended the writing lessons and made notes on the observation schedule on methods of teaching essay writing used by the teacher, nature of verbal feedback (criticism, praise or advice) and feedback strategies employed by the teacher.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of data classification, data coding, data entry and analysis in order to make interpretation possible. It is concerned with the statistics used to analyze data: organization, interpretation and presentation of collected data. Qualitative and quantitative data collected from questionnaires, observation schedules and corrected students" compositions were interpreted according to the themes arising in accordance to the objectives of the study. The qualitative data obtained from questionnaires and observation schedules was analyzed using thematic analysis by grouping responses into various themes according to the objectives of the study. Quantitative data obtained from questionnaires, observation schedules and the marked compositions were tabulated, coded and processed using the statistical package for social science (SPSS Version 21.0). The quantitative data was used to verify the qualitative data obtained (triangulation). Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages and mean were used to analyze the quantitative data.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Methods Used in Teaching Essay Writing Skills

The first objective of the study was to establish the methods used by English language teachers to teach essay writing skills. The results of the study revealed that teachers frequently use lecture, and question and answer methods. These are traditional methods and do not actively involve the students in the learning process. The methods are more of teacher centered than student centered. Brain storming, debate and group work were rarely used by the teachers. This means that classroom instruction is conducted using teacher friendly methods which do not involve the student and thus do not cater for individual learner needs. The findings partly agree with those by a study conducted by Ahmed (2010) who asserts that students" inability to perform

in written essays is as a result of the teachers" reliance on the use of conventional methods at the expense of the learner interests. This could be one of the causes of low academic achievement in English in the area under study. From this study we conclude that it"s due to the poor choice of the teaching methodologies that the students so perform badly in their English compositions. It is imperative therefore that the teachers be sensitized on the need to involve the learner more into the teaching and learning activities. They need to employ methods that would involve the learner more than what is the case.

Methods Used to Assess Essays

The second objective was to explore methods used by teachers to assess composition writing. The results of the study showed that teachers frequently give writing tasks once per week. Further, the results revealed that teachers frequently give writing tasks using a sentence to begin or to end with. Such assessment strategies only confine the student to into the lead sentence and do not give the learner an opportunity to write based on his knowledge. Assessment methods known to enhance thinking and creativity such as giving a context, showing a film or pictures to create a story were rarely used. The results agree with Okwara (2012) who found out that lack of adequate assessment can easily affect students" writing competence. There is need therefore, for students to be exposed to a variety of assessment methods in order to develop their composition writing competence. It is therefore established that for the performance of students in composition to improve, the teachers need to vary their assessment tools that would give them a more clear feedback on which to base on for better mastery. From this study, we have shown that feedback strategies need to be developed with the student in mind and not what is the case where the teacher bases it on factors that favor him.

Strategies Used to Give Feedback to Students

The third objective of the study was to establish strategies used by English language teachers to give feedback to student writers. The finding of this study shows that teachers frequently use grades, written comments and codes to give feedback to students. Oral feedback which is interactive and immediate is rarely used. This implies that teachers hardly have time to meet their students and guide them on areas in their compositions that need improvement. The findings of the study are in agreement with another study in Europe who argue that too many written comments may damage the learners" confidence and motivation to write (Pugazhenthi, 2012). The teachers need to meet students more often and guide them in writing skills in order to realize a better performance in essay writing. A better teacher student interaction is therefore key to better feedback. This study has shown that the lack of good feedback strategy has a contribution to poor performance. It"s imperative therefore that the trend is reveres wed to better the performance.

Students' Perception to Feedback

The fourth objective of the study sought to investigate students" perception to teacher feedback. Results of the study showed that students in the various schools studied (boys, girls and mixed) valued teacher feedback. Students in the single sex schools frequently took notes and revised work done in class. They also proof read written essays and made corrections to rectify mistakes. In mixed schools, findings show that students frequently took notes and revised work learnt in class. The results further show that students rarely made corrections to rectify mistakes their compositions, rarely proof read their marked compositions and rarely wrote extra essays for marking. This means that learner based activities are minimal in mixed schools and are only realized during contact time. Students rarely engage in activities that highly involve them to improve their essay writing skills. The study established that the strategies used for feedback by teachers are dependent on the background of the learners. Whereas those in boarding schools prefer take home assignments, those in day schools abhor this method due to time constraints. In mixed schools, students hardly have time to do extra work because of time constraints especially after school since there are house hold chores to be done at home. The perception of learners towards the various strategies therefore needs to be inculcated in the planning for the strategies to be used during teaching. Student perception to feedback mechanisms is also supported by a previous study in Australia among undergraduate students. In the study, students" self–esteem, self-concept and self-efficacy have a bearing on the effectiveness of the feedback mechanisms used (Rowe, 2011). The same feedback to different students can elicit different reactions. The study therefore showed that there is need to consider the learners" ability into consideration while planning for instruction as well as when giving feedback.

Students' Perception on the Influence of Feedback in Attaining Competence in Essay Writing

The fifth objective of the study investigated the role of teacher feedback in attaining competence in essay writing. Results of the study showed that students in boys" schools frequently used teacher feedback to revise their compositions. In girls" schools, results showed that students value teacher feedback since it helps them to improve their writing, master different types of writing and to motivate them to write. In mixed schools, students valued teacher feedback because it helps them to revise their compositions, to improve their writing and motivates them to write better. The study results agree with a previous one that argue that feedback strategies improve students" essay writing skills. Teachers therefore, should give feedback that caters for students" unique needs to help them to be competent writers (Budge, 2011). A clear and immediate feedback helps the learner to gain competence in essay writing skills. Thus, for effective instruction therefore, the learners" needs should minded for better performance. It is furthermore noted that feedback is very important in the learning process and has to be minded when planning to teach and even after the instruction process. A deliberate move has to be made to develop effective feedback strategies that will be used during the instruction process.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that, in regard to methods used to teach essay writing skills, the findings of the study indicated that teachers of English mainly use lecture and question and answer. Effective methods such as group discussion, debate and brainstorming are rarely used and yet they are more effective. There is need for a shift in pedagogy. The results on methods used to assess essay writing skills show that teachers mainly give students a phrase to begin or to end with. These assessment techniques do not involve the learner in thinking since they will only write as guided. Assessment methods that develop students" creative skills such as giving a context, students" choosing their titles and showing a film or pictures to create a story should be more frequently used to try and change the way instruction is conducted. Furthermore, teachers need to employ a variety of assessment strategies that will involve students to think and enhance their creativity to achieve competence in essay writing skills.

Regarding teacher feedback techniques, the findings showed that teachers frequently use grades, written comments and codes to give feedback on essays. These methods are biased towards the learner since most students may not interpret the grades and codes used. The written comments too may not be clear. Thus, teachers need to hold conferences with students to guide them on essay writing skills.

Findings on student perceptions to feedback indicate that students in single sex schools are more involved in learner-based activities as opposed to those in mixed schools. This could be due to availability of time because most single sex schools are boarding while the mixed schools are day. Therefore, teachers should put into consideration the learners" background while giving feedback.

Finally, study findings on the role of teacher feedback indicate that all students value teacher feedback. They find feedback important in improving their writing skills, revising and proof reading their essays. Thus, there is need for teachers to provide clear and immediate feedback that puts into consideration learner"s needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Firstly, English language teachers should use essay-teaching methods that involve the learner during instruction. These teachers could use debate, brainstorming and group discussion to teach essay-writing skills since these methods have been shown to help students to develop their essay writing skills.

Secondly, English language teachers should employ a variety of essay assessment methods to expose students to more involving tasks that will enhance their thinking and develop their writing skills. Methods such as allowing students to choose topics to write on, showing pictures or films to create a story and giving a context could highly awaken learners thinking and creativity. In addition, assessments in essay writing should be more frequent.

Thirdly, English language teachers should train students the meaning of grades and codes they use to give feedback. In addition, teacher feedback should be clear, focused and immediate.

Fourthly, Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) should organize workshops to guide teachers on how to give feedback to students based on their ability and background. This in turn will help students to make better use of teacher feedback in proofreading their essays and writing extra essays for marking to develop their writing skills.

Finally, English language teachers should engage in team teaching and assessment to help students experience various methods of teaching and assessment as well as a variety of teacher comments, which will enable them to develop their essay writing competence.

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