Influence of instructional techniques on primary school learner competencies in composition writing in Kenya

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Abstract

The use of instructional techniques as a pedagogical technique is crucial in developing learner competence in composition writing. This paper reports findings of a study that investigated the influence of instructional techniques on learner competence in composition writing in Kenyan public primary schools. Pragmatism paradigm underpinned the study which adopted a sequential mixed-method design. Communicative Language Theory advanced by Wilkins and Hymes and the Competency-Based Language Teaching preponed by Richards and Rodgers guided the study. Respondents were upper primary teachers of English and learners in Bomet County in Kenya in the year 2019. Data was generated by use of questionnaire, teachers' interview, lesson observation, document analysis, and focus group discussion. Findings established that instructional techniques had no great influence and statistical significance in envisaging the learner outcomes in composition writing (B= -.004, p > 0.05). Expository and experiential techniques were dominantly used very often by 191(33.3%) and 182 (31.7%) teachers respectively. Learner interests and background were not considered when determining instructional techniques to use to develop learner competence in composition writing. The study recommended that the Teachers Service Commission, should immediately organise training of practising teachers of English on how to effectively apply instructional techniques to address low learner competencies in composition writing in Kenya.
Keywords: Composition writing, learner competence, instructional techniques

1.Introduction

Recent developments in English language teaching (ELT) suggest a paradigm shift from teaching English as a second language (ESL) to teaching English as an International Language (EIL), and that it should be manifested in the curriculum, classroom practices, and in the teaching and learning materials (Nguyen, Marlina, & Cao, 2020). The authors argue that there is a need to embrace linguistic diversity by learning to use English in global contexts and similarly retain linguistic identity in the multilingual use of language. One consequence of pedagogy underpinned by this study in ELT is the creation of opportunities for teachers of English to draw on content and teaching skills and thus gain experience (and assume an 'insider" identity as a language teacher). That is essential in achieving the desired learners' communicative competence (Pennington & Richards,

2016). The relationship between learner language competencies and teaching ability as situated in this study is a focus in second language teacher education, mainly through the work on teacher cognition and teaching knowledge as intimated by various authors (Freeman, 2002; Freeman, 2016; Freeman, Garcia, Katz, & Burns, 2015).

Pedagogical knowledge and ability assert the teacher's subject matter knowledge, the repertoire of techniques employed in teaching, adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners and presented for instruction' (Shulman, 1987). However, as alluded to by Ong'ondo and Borg (2011), teaching is a complex which requires teachers to take into account by making sense of the often unpredictable and dynamic interrelationships among some variables such as teachers, learners, context and the curriculum. Discourse skills also provide the means and ability to maintain communication in English that is fluent, accurate, and understandable to the learners. These instructional techniques towards imbibing desired learner communicative competencies were situated in the current study done in Kenya. Next is the context of the study.

2.Study Context

This study was conducted in Bomet county in Kenya. At the time of this study, a newly introduced curriculum in the country at the basic education level, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC), was running at grades 1, 2, 3 and 4. CBC is an education structure of 2-6-3-3; that is two years in pre-school, six years of primary education, three years of junior secondary education, and three years of senior secondary education (KICD, 2017). English remains a compulsory learning area (subject) from grade 1 and the language of instruction from grade four onwards in all the subjects, thus playing a central role in CBC. However, the learners in this study were those of the older 8-4-4 system in classes 5, 6, and 7. The system, being phased out, and having been discredited with being overloaded and too demanding, was structured to take eight years of primary education, four years of secondary education, and four minimum years of university education.

The predominant community living in Bomet county (the study area) is the Kipsigis (Langat, 2015). They are the most populous sub-tribe among the eight closely related Kalenjin community and live at the highland parts of the Rift valley. Thus, they are categorised linguistically as Highland Nilotes (Chelangat, 2019; Naibei & Lwangale, 2018). One study on the Kipsigis language has established that it has a tripartite system of number marking as quoted from Kouneli (2019) thus:

> …Kipsigis has a tripartite system of number marking. Some nouns are morphologically unmarked in the singular, and form their plural with a plural suffix. Other nouns are unmarked in the plural and form their singular with a singulative suffix. In contrast, the third class of nouns always have a singulative suffix in the singular and a plural suffix in the plural (p. xii).

The author argues that this pattern in the language is due to a noun classification system based on several features that interact with some other features to generate the three types of number markings. English language, on its part, commonly has two number markings (Dalrymple, 2012). The example below illustrated by Dalrymple affirms this point:

> The **boy** **is** laughing
>   SG   SG
> The **boys** **are** laughing
>   PL   PL
> **Key**: SG- Singular; PL- Plural

The above contextual information is important as it could impact on English language learning and specifically structuring of sentences which is critical to composition writing. The implication is that

teachers' pedagogical strategies ought to take cognisance that learners of English from this community (who are the majority in classrooms in Bomet County) may need more effort to adjust to apparent differences in linguistic structures considering that the first language's elements have already been established. It could explain the low performance in composition writing. Against this backdrop, a problem was conceptualised that underpinned this study, more so on instructional techniques in use.

Instructional techniques were defined in this study as classroom tactics and processes employed by teachers to help learners develop competencies in composition writing effectively. Such techniques include expository technique, task-based technique, questioning technique, experiential technique, problem-solving, and collaborative technique. Instructional techniques were one of the pedagogical strategies identified in the larger study as elements used by teachers of English within the upper primary school context in Kenya. Next is a review of the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

3. Theoretical Review

This study was underpinned by the Communicative Language Theory (CLT) preponed by Wilkins (1972) and Hymes (1972) and the more recent Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) advocated by Richards and Rodgers (2014). The central tenets propagated by CLT are that language is learned majorly for communicative functions, the target language must be appropriately put into use and integrate all language skills. Ong'ondo (2017b) observed that CLT is an approach that recognises language as a social tool that is used for social interactions. Ong'ondo further noted that CLT encourages flexible learning arrangements such as working in pairs and groups to personalise the content by using the language to talk about themselves, their environments, and experiences. Thus, the target language is not only an object of study but also a vehicle for classroom communication.

In addition to the above, there is a need to exist a cooperative teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships that enhance a relaxed classroom atmosphere, which in turn promotes effective learning. Other aspects include; imbibing the functional elements of language, individualised learning and teaching, and process-oriented instruction. Considering that knowledge and learning have been embraced as socially developed in the course of negotiations according to socio-cognitive views, CLT is thus viewed as learner-centred and experience-based.

These aspects apply to composition writing that requires the teacher to develop writers who use the target language in depicting several proficiencies. Such proficiencies include personal/ individual voice, convincing account, fluency, exciting story, originality, legibility, and independence. Others are the correct use of grammar, the use of varied structures, varied use of vocabulary, effective conveyance of information, meaningful expression of ideas, and overall, effective communication. Moreover, the use of the CLT approach in Kenyan schools in the teaching of English language in active use on a relevant day-to-day context and functions has been highly recommended by the Ministry of Education (Ong'ondo, 2018).

Another related theory that influence instructional techniques as a pedagogical strategy is the Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT). This theory is a post-CLT development and is consistent with the tenets of CLT. For instance, the proponents contend that the main focus is what the learners are expected to do with the language (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). That means that

attention is on outcomes derived from an analysis of learner tasks to function proficiently, and therefore, the syllabus is tailored around the desired competency, which in this case is in composition writing. Therefore, CBLT in this study focuses on the link between the targeted pedagogical strategy and the learner competencies.

On instructional techniques, CLT has moved towards an emphasis on the use of group work, task-work, information-gap activities, and projects as part and parcel of the processes. Teacher roles have changed to being facilitators of learners' language learning and monitoring of learner performance (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). For example, it is achieved by assigning learners with writing tasks after providing guidelines, allowing organised discussions, and tracking performance periodically. The teacher intervenes as the need arises. Learner roles have deviated from being passive listeners of instructions to a negotiator between self, the group, the class procedure, and the assigned group activities (Maryslessor, Barasa & Omulando, 2014). A review of related literature is next.

4. Literature Review
This study identified and reviewed some of the relevant instructional techniques on the teaching of composition writing. Available literature indicates that globally, teachers of English prefer some form of communication, teaching and learning techniques (Dearden, 2014). However, a successful teacher is not biased in favour of one technique or another and should be competent and comfortable with the available techniques for use. Dockrell, Marshall, & Wyse (2016), Gakori (2015) and Teshome, Bezabih, Admassu, & Wolyie (2017) all indicate that teachers have different techniques, which can be used to improve learners' writing and other language skills. Therefore, a diligent teacher continuously learns new techniques and knows the new directions in the teaching of English.

From the preceding, English composition writing can be taught using a variety of techniques. The prevalent practise in Kenyan primary schools involve; writing the topic of the composition on the chalkboard, discussing the story plan, and then allowing pupils to write the essay using either the individualised or the group/cooperative/collaborative techniques. Adera, Kochung, Adoyo, and Matu (2016) recommend that teaching English composition writing to learners in Kenya should begin at Class 1 level to focus on mastery of pronouns as cohesive ties prior knowledge of the world and sentence structure. Currently, emphasis to composition writing in primary schools begin at class 5 (KIE, 2002). There is, therefore, need to integrate different strategies in class to develop learners' composition writing skills. Some of the techniques include use of the expository technique (lecture), task-based technique, questioning technique, experiential technique (building on learner experience) and collaborative techniques (group work and problem-solving techniques). Each of these, as applicable to this study, is briefly elaborated below.

A group work (collaboration) technique is an approach where the language teacher engages learners in groups to initiate deliberations on the given task. Group participation and the shared thought process will have a say at the end of the interaction, resulting in improved performance (Otunga, Odeo & Barasa, 2011). In this approach, assignments are done and handled by the teams. The main focus is the involvement of learners to enhance their approach to language learning and their adaptability. Positive interdependence, working for the group/team's success, both as an individual and group-wise accountability, focus on unified performance, emphasis on teamwork skills, and collaborative work pattern – are some of the salient features of this approach (Grove,

2018). Language learning, group behaviour, contribution to the group, among other aspects, are practically on usage.

Another technique is **problem-solving**. This technique attempts to address language problems through the process of learning and unfolds the problem aspects through the application of knowledge and skills, intending to solve them. In the communicative approach, the teacher does not look at the language learning as a set of linguistic patterns to store in learners' memory. Instead, the teacher aims at developing learner communicative competence (Andersen, 2013). The language teacher intelligently involves the set of learners, who feel shy about involvement to learn a particular language item, to find a solution to the language problem (Habrat, 2018).

Building on learner experience (questioning) is a technique where the teacher asks questions to support learners in eliciting correct responses. It helps learners to think critically and work towards mastery of content. Most probing questions are open-ended and are designed for deep thought on a specific topic. English language has four types of probing questions: yes, or no questions, use of wh-words (what, when, where, which, whom, whose, why, who, and how), choice questions, and tag or tail questions. The language teacher asks questions on a particular context for learners to develop their thoughts and views to ventilate upon their opinions in response (Bada & Olusegun, 2015).

The task-based technique is mainly based on tasks as part of the core unit of planning and instruction in language teaching. The focus is heavily on the process of communication than on the delivery of the final product (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Here, traditional grammar methods, structural grammar methods, etc. are not in focus, but instead, this method compels learners to take part in the task given by the teacher. Learners have no grammatical barriers to deter them from expressing their ideas. Hence, they, to a large extend, shun their inhibitions and take part in the deliberations voluntarily in an attempt to be successful on the tasks given (Chiu, 2011). At times, lessons become competitive by nature among the learners, forcing them to actively take part in a given task, thus enhancing the zeal to learn more (Prasad, 2014).

The expository (lecture) technique is used by teachers of English to develop listening skills and speaking skills, which is paramount to developing writing skills. This is attending and interpreting oral English. The student listens to oral speech in English, then separates into segments, the stretch of utterances he hears, groups them into words, phrases and sentences and finally, understands the message that this carry (Casanave, 2013). Through the lecture technique, internal thinking and reasoning are carried out. Learners listen to understand as part of using English for the communicative purpose (Sevik, 2012). In listening to the lecture, students imitate and memorise linguistic items such as words, idioms, and sentences. The constructs obtained from the listening sessions will be useful in writing. Next is a brief description of the methodology adopted in this study.

5. Methodology
This paper is extracted from a doctoral study conducted by the author in 2019. The study was underpinned by the pragmatist paradigm. Creswell & Plano_Clark (2018) posit that the main focus of pragmatism is on the consequences of the study, that is: i) importance is attached to the question asked rather than the method; and ii) use of a variety of data collection methods to inform the problem under research. Therefore, as these authors affirm, it is pluralistic, aligned to 'what works,' and is a real-world practice. The study was conducted in two phases, with emphasis placed on first

one. The first phase was used for the collection of quantitative data by use of survey method, whose results were analysed, and after that, the results were used to plan for the qualitative phase. Data collection in the second phase, which employed multiple case study method, was to establish corroboration and complementarity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The study site was Bomet County in Kenya whose choice was informed by the similarity of trends in the national Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) English composition writing results, more so in the public schools' category. Teachers of English in upper primary, specifically in classes 5, 6 and 7 and learners were targeted due to their direct involvement in the teaching and learning of composition writing respectively. Class 8 was not engaged in the study since they were preparing to sit for the national examination. Through simple random sampling, with the help of a randomiser computer program, a sample of 196 schools were used to obtain a total of 588 teachers of English from the three classes who filled a questionnaire during the first phase. Quantitative data were analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics on the construct of instructional techniques that sought to establish case distribution across the target variable (Nestor & Schutt, 2012).

During the second qualitative phase, a smaller sample of 29 schools, distributed almost equally among the three classes was selected purposively for in-depth understanding (Ngigi, Wakahiu, & Karanja, 2016). Document analysis, lesson observation, teachers' interview and pupils' focus group discussion were used as tools for data generation. Thematic analysis was then used to derive patterns, themes, develop explanations and interpretations (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Saketa, 2014; Obuya & Ong'ondo, 2020). To eliminate threats to internal validity, collection of data using questionnaires was done for the shortest period to maximise the interest of participants.

The use of a variety of data generation tools enhanced credibility and collection of rich data (Obuya & Ong'ondo, 2020). This allowed triangulation which contributes to verification and validation of analysis by checking on the consistency of findings generated by varying research methods and data sources in the same method (Hussein, 2015; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014; Yilmaz, 2013). In addition, prolonged engagement with participants was done for familiarity, and building of trust to obtain rich data. Besides, there was a keen observation of teachers' lessons to identify the main characteristics and elements to focus on in detail. More than one theory underpinning this study likewise supported the credibility of findings (Stumpfegger, 2017) discussed next.

6. Findings
In this section, a report of part of the findings conducted during the bigger study stated earlier is presented. On the influence of instructional techniques on learner competencies in English language composition writing (ELCW), two aspects were investigated: the range of instructional techniques and issues determining their use. The study established that instructional techniques (B= -.004, p > 0.05) had no statistical significance in predicting learner outcomes in composition writing. Results obtained from these two cited parameters are provided as follows:

6.1 Range of Instructional Techniques
Respondents were given six techniques used in teaching and were asked to rate how often each was used during English composition lessons using; Very often (VO), Often (O), Rarely (R), and Never (N). Table 1 below is a summary of the results.

Table 1: Teaching techniques for English Composition Writing

Teaching Techniques	Very Often		Often		Rarely		Never	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
i)Expository Technique	191	33.3	294	51.2	81	14.1	8	1.4
ii)Task-based technique	100	17.4	332	57.8	124	21.6	18	3.1
iii)Questioning technique	36	6.3	214	37.3	200	34.8	124	21.6
iv)Experiential technique	182	31.7	290	50.5	97	16.9	5	0.9
v)Collaborative technique	139	24.2	287	50.0	132	23.0	15	2.6
vi)Problem-solving technique	66	11.5	269	46.9	188	32.8	51	8.9

Source*: Field data (2019)*

From among the six selected techniques, results indicate that the expository technique, compared to other techniques, was reported to be the dominantly used technique by the highest number of respondents. 191(33.3%) teachers used it very often, and a further 294(51.2%) teachers used it often. It was followed by experiential technique, where it was used very often by 182 (31.7%) while 290(50.5%) used it often. The collaborative technique was used very often by 139(24.2%) teachers and 285(50.0%) teachers often. However, 132(23.0%) teachers reported that they used collaborative technique rarely while only 15(2.6%) teachers indicated that they never used the technique. The Task-based technique was 'most commonly used' by teachers where more than half 332(57.8%) used it often, in addition to 100(17.4%) who also used it very often.

The questioning technique was used very often by only 36(6.3%) of the teachers, often by 214(37.3%) teachers, rarely by 200(34.8%) teachers and never by 124(21.6%) teachers. There were mixed responses on all the categories that teachers were asked to select from, except for the few who responded under 'very often' and was the lowest among all the techniques. It was also the technique that the majority 124(21.6%) never used in teaching composition writing.

For problem-solving technique, it was the only technique where less than 50% of the teachers used it often by 269(46.9%) teachers. It was also the second-highest technique that was rarely used by 188(32.8%) teachers after the questioning technique. This finding suggests that learners are involved most of the time doing tasks alongside the teachers' lecture method during English composition lessons (Mao, 2012). It was also noted that when respondents who use selected methods often and very often are put together, the expository technique was the most popular 485(84.5%), followed by experiential technique 472(82.2%).

Since results from the quantitative phase revealed that the expository technique was dominantly used, whereas questioning technique was hardly in use, further inquiry was made through the use of other tools for more insight. Results obtained from the analysis of 29 teachers' schemes of work and lesson plans reveal that a variety of instructional techniques, which include questioning are planned for in the schemes of work and lesson plans and are indicated as frequently used. Also, learning activities are recorded in the schemes of work and lesson plans and are remarked as 'very frequently used'.

However, from lesson observations, findings revealed that the conventional approaches used were not as anticipated from the schemes of work and lesson plans. Active learner participation was limited to chorus reading and personal writing. Learners were not given tasks that ignite synthesis and analysis. Besides, learner involvement in the process of conceptualising meaning and knowledge construction was not observed. They were, in most cases, treated as a passive audience as teachers dominated lessons by talking.

When asked about their preference of the instructional techniques in use, a teacher in school **Z165B** explained, "There is very little time to cover the content planned for the lesson, so I have to use the lecturing technique, though it is discouraged". Another teacher also said, "I know approaches like use of group work and pairing is effective, but it is time consuming and one may not attain the targets set in the lesson objectives within 35 minutes" (Teacher, **W46C**).

Teachers' use of probing for learner understanding was not attempted at all in the lessons observed. As a consequence, process-oriented learning, where teachers act as facilitators in making learners come up with ideas on how to write suitable compositions and thinking about the process, did not occur in the majority of lessons observed. One teacher in class five argued that learners' age was a factor for the choice of the teaching techniques in the following statement:

> … Class five pupils are still young and are encountering composition writing for the first time. As such, I have to guide them since they have no idea on how to develop a story in writing to share with others (Teacher, **Z190A**).

Another teacher in class seven expressed thoughts that composition writing is challenging to learners and commented as follows,

> … Our pupils find composition writing a challenge, so I have to do my best to explain. Children find it hard to be creative, possibly because of the way they have been handled from the lower classes (Teacher, **W53C**).

The teacher from school **W53C** seemed to be aware that teaching techniques used influenced learner performance. It was also noted that most lessons were hardly focused on the targeted composition skills recorded in the schemes of work. Those that were, were not done exhaustively. For example, a teacher in school **Z165B** had planned to use discussion during the lesson but did not materialise. When asked, the teacher explained, "I ran short of time and other issues came up during the lesson, so I could not engage them in the discussion". In school **V31A**, the lesson plan had reflected the use of a music festival set poem, yet the script was not available in class. When asked about the omission, this teacher said, "I needed to use it, but I did not have enough copies, so left it for another day".

Contrarily, and in most schools where lessons were observed, sequential teaching was done as reflected in the teaching from simple to complex, and from known to the unknown. Towards the end of the lessons, most teachers gave out assignments for learners to do individually. Individual learner attention was, however, not witnessed in any of the schools. Teachers commented,

> … The enrolment is too huge to attend to every learner need (Teacher, **Y161B**)

… I will address individual learner needs when marking the composition exercises where I will give comments. It is difficult to do that during the actual teaching within the 35 minutes (Teacher, **W53C**)

Similarly, none of the schools observed gave tasks to learners in groups such as pooling together ideas in pairs to write a joint composition. This was corroborated during focus group discussions where pupils in three schools emphatically gave the following remarks;

- We don't do assignments in groups. It is individual work always (FGD **V12C**)
- No, we have never done assignments in groups (FGD, **W45C**)
- It is very rare. When we do so, we learn from the mistakes of others (FGD **W46C**)

It also came out that teachers are at times compelled to explain a concept using the mother tongue. This was expressed by one pupil in a school who stated as follows;

Some pupils don't understand English, so the teacher sometimes explains in the   Kipsigis language (FGD, **X93C**)

From the preceding, the use of a variety of instructional techniques has not been achieved. Teachers continue to apply the expository technique even in composition writing, which is meant to adopt a learner-centred approach. In addition, learners are not given room to discuss with their peers and thus, limiting their application of cognition and expressiveness. This is made worse by the periodic use of mother tongue in teaching composition writing in English language. The next component investigated was on the issues that determine the use of instructional techniques to develop learner competence in ELCW.

6.2 Issues Determining the Use of Instructional Techniques

In this study, it was important to analyse available composition writing scores in form of mean scores from the sampled schools. These mean scores are normally used in institutions as yardsticks of performance, and in this case, the level of learner competencies in composition writing. Three categories adopted from KCPE composition marking formats were used to summarise the scores from the three classes: Group A (21-30) rated as very good, Group B (16-20) rated as average, and Group C (1-15) rated as below average. No school obtained a mean score of 31-40 and was thus not part of the categorisation.

The following issues were then identified as determinants on the use of instructional techniques: syllabus guidelines, learner interest, background knowledge, learner abilities, and environmental/ contextual factors. Responses from the three groups A, B and C, were compared. Below are the ANOVA results in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Issues determining the use of instructional techniques

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Syllabus guidelines	Between Groups	2.712	2	1.356	2.293	.102
	Within Groups	337.757	571	.592		
	Total	340.469	573			
Learner interests	Between Groups	19.513	2	9.757	8.891	.000
	Within Groups	626.621	571	1.097		
	Total	646.134	573			
Background knowledge	Between Groups	4.210	2	2.105	6.207	.002
	Within Groups	193.644	571	.339		
	Total	197.854	573			
Learning abilities	Between Groups	2.712	2	1.356	2.293	.102
	Within Groups	337.757	571	.592		
	Total	340.469	573			
Environmental/ contextual factors	Between Groups	2.527	2	1.264	2.512	.082
	Within Groups	287.201	571	.503		
	Total	289.728	573			

Results indicated that there were statistically significant differences between groups on two issues that determine the use of instructional techniques: Learner interests $(F2, 571) = 2.5488$, p=0.000) and Background knowledge $(F2, 571) = 1.7561$, p=0.002). However, there were no statistically significant difference between groups on the issues of Syllabus guidelines $(F2, 571) = 3.3746$, p=0.102); Learning abilities $(F2, 571) = 3.3746$, p=0.102); and Environmental/ contextual factors $F2, 571) = 2.0936$, p=0.082). Descriptive statistics reveal that group C scored higher means in all the constructs, indicating that they very often considered all the constructs when determining the use of instructional techniques. The next was group B and then group A. Therefore, the implication is that when these determinants are put into consideration when choosing an instructional strategy, learner performance in composition writing is improved.

The qualitative phase of this study interrogated further issues identified during the quantitative phase that had statistically significant differences among the groups. These were the consideration of pupils' learner interests and the learners' background knowledge. A statement by one teacher provides a summary of the general impression within the study area. The teacher reasoned that "syllabus coverage will not be achieved even up to midway if we go by learner interests since we cannot ask them to suggest topics that they prefer in composition writing. Even monthly exams do not give options" (Teacher, **X93C**). This comment indicates that teachers did not comprehend fully, what consideration for learner interest means. With further probing, one other teacher stated that "it is better to strictly follow the guidelines in the syllabus and approved textbooks because these are the materials that KNEC uses when setting examinations" (Teacher, **Y161B**).

Another teacher agreed that it is important to consider learners' background knowledge "… especially when you are taking over a subject from another teacher so as to gauge learner abilities, then make the appropriate choice of the teaching strategy" (Teacher, **Z165**). However, in one school, a teacher lamented that,

> "… with large classes of up to 60 pupils, it is a challenge to establish every learner's background knowledge in composition writing. I, therefore, use an approach that is convenient in covering the content within the allocated time (Teacher, **X102C**).

Further analysis of qualitative data revealed that the majority of teachers interviewed from schools whose learners performed better in composition writing factored in both learner interest and background knowledge when choosing an instructional strategy. Other teachers argued that they only followed the dictates of the syllabus. Below is a brief discussion of findings.

7. Discussion

Quantitative findings revealed that the expository technique was dominantly used 'very often' by 191(33.3%) and often by 294(51.2%) teachers respectively. In contrast, the questioning technique was never used by the highest number of teachers, 124(21.6%). This was confirmed through lesson observation. The findings contradict Wandera's (2012) study, which concluded that the lecture method (expository technique) was rarely adopted in the teaching of the English language in Nairobi County. The same findings revealed that 84(48.3%) teachers very often used question and answer method. Similarly, another study by Syomwene (2016), indicated that the questioning method was used by teachers to prompt all learners to take part in the lessons. This was not the case in the current study. Therefore, teachers should desist from the over-use of the expository technique, specifically in composition writing, which requires a process-oriented approach.

As for group discussion and experiential technique, nearly half of the respondents in this study often used both techniques. Communicative language teaching theory advocates for group assignments to enhance cooperative relationships in the classroom for effective communication (Desai, 2015). Syomwene, Barasa and Kindiki (2015) add that group work encourages cooperative learning and makes students independent of the teacher. The same is supported by Richards & Rodgers (2014), who advocate for group work, task-work, information-gap activities, and use of projects as part of the competency-based language teaching strategies. This interaction will hopefully help to improve on learner competencies in composition writing.

It was similarly evident from these findings that the techniques used in the teaching of English composition writing has not received desired innovativeness and limited itself majorly to expository technique, without the use of small group and class discussions. This is consistent with studies in Europe and America (Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014) and replicated in African classrooms (Navsaria, Pascoe, & Kathard, 2011). As noted, such techniques should suit the teacher's abilities, knowledge of subject content and interests, suit learner's abilities, suit the type of teaching to be carried out, and suit the subject content at hand (Snoek, 2012).

However, in this study, despite the schemes of work and lesson plans indicating the use of various techniques, data from lesson observation showed contrasting results. For instance, a lesson in school **Z165A** had indicated the use of discussion technique, yet, ended up not applying it. This raises a concern that instructional techniques planned for, are never implemented during actual teaching. The implication is that lessons are not being conducted to meet set objectives in the schemes of

work and by extension in the syllabus, thereby making learners miss out on desired competencies. This now leads to the conclusions and recommendations of the study next.

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of instructional techniques on upper primary learners' competence in composition writing. The study established that most teachers rely on the expository technique and seem to assume that more talk means being productive. However, literature revealed that learner involvement by use of techniques such as pair work, group work, task-based teaching, and process-oriented writing is more effective (Bishaw & Ezigiabher, 2013; Maryslessor, Barasa & Omulando, 2014; Nthiga, 2010; Ong'ondo, 2017c; Smagorinsky, 2013). The study findings revealed that learner interests and learner backgrounds were not fully factored in to determine instructional strategies in developing learner competencies in composition writing.

The study recommends that the employer, the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should organise training of practising teachers of English at sub zonal levels on how to address low learner competencies in composition writing. Those reported in this study include lack of creativity, paragraphing; the building of a story; and lousy handwriting. Teachers should be in-serviced further to adopt strategies that are not teacher-centred, such as the use of collaborative techniques, learner participation, problem-based teaching, experiential technique, and effective use of target language.

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