



**REASONS FOR CONTINUED PARAGRAPH WRITING MISTAKES BY  
O' LEVEL PUPILS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE FREE COMPOSITION  
WRITING IN SELECTED SIX SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM THREE  
CLUSTERS IN MUTOKO DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE**

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**Abstract:**

This qualitative study sought to investigate the reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes by o' level pupils in English Language free composition writing in selected six secondary schools from three clusters in Mutoko District. The study was constrained by lack of literature. In this study, accidental sampled 12 teachers and 24 school pupils were used as research subjects. Interview, observation and document analysis methods were used to generate data. Document analysis/ review method was also used to provide information on guidance for the teachers of English Language on the teaching and learning procedures, teaching methods and strategies in paragraph writing as well as the objectives of the teaching of English Language as a foreign language to Zimbabwean students. The study found out that teachers who lack effective syllabus interpretation, expertise, skills and competencies are a detriment to paragraph writing and ultimately to free composition writing by O' Level pupils. Group work is central to language development of pupils searching for effective composition writing skills. Model paragraphs show learners the way and help them to know the techniques of writing logical compositions. Sentences are the firm foundation upon which effective composition writing based on paragraphs is built. The study concluded that that the possible reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level English Language pupils are diverse and vary from one student to another. Therefore, the factors and reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes discovered in this research are inadequate and inconclusive; and they have a direct impact on the students' ability to construct logical paragraphs. At the same time, collaborative and co-operative learning can help improve paragraph writing and the use of English Language paper one as

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the yardstick to measure competency in pupils writing skills has a detrimental effect on paragraph writing skills. The study recommends that pupils should develop a broad reading background, taught the structures of paragraphs using the hamburger method, step model, the five part model among others write coherent and logical paragraphs, build a good vocabulary and sentence construction skills and use of continuous assessment to determine the overall mark at O' Level. The study also recommends the use of continuous assessment by Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) in which pupils work is marked and the assessment marks contribute a certain percentage of the final mark should be introduced. Furthermore, in connection with paragraph writing and free composition writing skills, it is recommended that mother tongue interference and sentence construction are looked at. This might need further exploration which would also help to weigh the effects of different factors of paragraph writing mistakes.

**Keywords:** paragraph writing mistake, free composition, paragraphs, English language

## 1. Introduction

Paragraph writing remains a challenge for most of the students studying English Language or using English in other subjects like History, Geography and Divinity. English Language students have continued making paragraph writing mistakes that negatively impact in the clarity of what they would like to express especially when writing free compositions. Paragraph writing is a difficult process even in one's vernacular language. It is even more complex to write in one's second language. Cedar (2004) and Benson (2002) in Hourani (2008, p.7) purport that writing in a foreign language often presents the greatest challenge to students at all stages, particularly essay writing because in the activity, writing is usually extended and therefore it becomes more demanding than in the case of writing a short paragraph.

Richards and Renandya (2002, p.303) claim that *"there is no doubt that writing is the most difficult skill for second language learners to master. The difficulty lies not only in generating and organising ideas, but also in translating these notions into legible text."* O' Level English Language pupils often find challenges in constructing sound compositions with events that are organised chronologically without mixing ideas. The researcher has noted that researches conducted by other scholars like Sattayathan, A. and Ratanapinyowong (2008); Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2012), and Al-Yaari, Hammadi and Alyami (2013) explored grammatical errors made by pupils when writing essays in foreign language learning. These errors included noticeable deviations made by pupils reflecting the inter-

language competence of a learner. These include verb tenses, word forms, prepositions word order and or subject-verb agreement. These researchers did not explore the paragraph writing mistakes that play a pivotal role in making free compositions clearer since the structure and organisation of information and ideas in each paragraph is an essential step in the production of cohesive and logical essays.

A number of studies have been conducted on written paragraph errors committed by students. Al-Khasawneh (2013) analysed written English paragraph errors committed by undergraduate students in Malaysia and raised spelling, word errors and subject-verb agreement as the most prominent. Zawaherh (2012) investigated the written errors committed by tenth grade students who were studying at Ajloun Governorate Schools in Jordan. His research showed that wrong use of articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement and verb tenses were among the most frequent errors committed by students. The current researcher noted that among most researches carried out in Asian countries like Malaysia or Jordan, researchers did not look at components that make up good paragraphs, that is, the topic sentence, developers and terminators, that make the essential part in producing logical and sound free compositions.

An intensive survey at the researcher's school, Nyamuzuwe High, showed that O' Level pupils make paragraph writing mistakes when writing free compositions. That was supported by the compositions in the assessed pupils' exercise books. The researcher prepared free composition essay topics for the O' Level pupils in Mutoko District and asked other teachers of English language to sample five compositions with writing mistakes. The ultimate outcome was not pleasing and proved that most O' Level pupils were struggling to construct sound paragraphs with a topic sentence which was well developed or supported and eventually concluding the paragraph with a terminator or leaving the reader in suspense, in quest for more. That prompted the researcher sufficient background for finding the reasons why O' Level pupils continuously make paragraph writing mistakes at six secondary schools in three clusters in Mutoko District. In particular, pupils were failing to achieve English Language O' Level syllabus objective number 4.2 which required pupils to "*write a continuous narrative, an argument and a piece of descriptive or informative writing*" (Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination English Language Syllabus 2013, p.4).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The paragraph writing mistakes noted in the background to the study has led to pupils' failure to write coherent, clear and logical free compositions. Therefore, why do O' Level English Language pupils continue making paragraph writing mistakes in free compositions?

### 1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by four questions. These are:

- What reasons could be responsible for the continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level English Language pupils?
- How did the reasons affect the ability to construct logical paragraphs?
- What could be done to improve paragraph writing skills in English Language among O' Level pupils in Secondary Schools?
- How effective were teachers' strategies in teaching paragraph writing skills?

## 2. Related Literature

### 2.1 Conceptual Framework

The starting point was to identify what paragraph writing is all about and then assess how pupils begin to develop writing skills and create coherent paragraphs before looking at the mistakes they commit. Paragraph writing or the organisation of a paragraph is of primary importance. Writing builds larger units from smaller ones; that is, writers use words to make sentences, sentences to make paragraphs, and paragraphs to make such compositions as letters, reports, and persuasive pieces of work (Sattayatham and Ratanapinyowong, 2008). They purport that a paragraph is a unit of writing which expresses one central idea and consists of two kinds of sentences: a topic sentence and a number of supporting statements.

Delloto (2011) provided more details about the essential parts for paragraph writing which include a topic sentence, supporting sentences, details, logical order, logical connectors, a concluding sentence, unity and coherence. The ideas in the paragraph must be presented in logical order by using transition words or connecting words which indicate the relationship between the ideas that means ideas must be chronological presented and in a causal way. A paragraph may have a concluding sentence, which restates the main idea in a different way.

Coherence means "*to stick together.*" In writing, it means that there must be a smooth flow of thoughts from one idea to the next. The use of connectors called transition words or phrases that link one sentence to another is one of the best ways to achieve coherence (Wyrick 2010:211).

Therefore, to produce an effective piece of writing, pupils should focus on organisation by selecting an appropriate topic sentence, identifying general and specific statements, arranging sentences in order and inserting or deleting some sentences and ending with a concluding sentence.

Through the teaching and learning process, pupils acquire writing skills and mistakes in paragraph writing are often attributed to the teaching and learning process where the teacher plays a pivotal role because mistakes committed by the teacher are directly translated to pupils who will in turn fail to construct meaningful paragraphs and compositions. Jie (2008), notes that an error happens from a lack of essential knowledge of a language learner. However, it can be noted that errors can be accepted as a kind of learning activity taking place in the learner (Liu and Braine 2005). Writing skills is more complex in that it tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas. As a result, pupils need to write not only coherently but correctly which requires more time and effort (Liu and Braine 2005, p.623). This means that the writing process is strengthened if it is systematically supported by an experienced teacher through correction of composition writing mistakes and the teaching of writing skills.

Delloto (2011) notes that the duty of a composition teacher is clear and it is to supply a concrete method as the only means to reduce to some kind of order a growing mind woefully chaotic and muddled paragraphs. Hence, teachers use different teaching strategies or methods in teaching paragraphing which includes the step by step approach by Dye (2012), Step Model by Rasheed et al. (2013) or the Hamburger teaching strategy by Richards (2008) among others. These teaching strategies are supplemented by the teachers' ability to eloquently express themselves when conducting lessons. Through supervision, teacher become active participants, plans and discuss jointly with Heads of Departments lessons taught afterwards. Teacher supervision will then enhance performance and effectiveness of teaching strategies that are employed by the teachers.

During the teaching and learning process, English Language teachers and learners are guided by the National Syllabus, schemes of work and policies. This means that the syllabus guides teachers by providing a planned course of instruction. Gwarinda (2002) defines national syllabus as an aggregate of several categories of information of information such as aims and objectives, content, methods and assessment that spell out the depth and breadth of the course. Because National Syllabus and Languages policies dwell much on theoretical perspectives which does not consider learner's background, the teacher often find difficulties in exploiting concepts of second language to pupils who have a strong mother language orientation during the teaching and learning process in various schools across the country.

Inadequate language knowledge, at time, leads to ineffective second language writing on account of the differences between mother language and second language. Weijen, Bergh, Rijlaarsdam and Sanders (2009) claim that constraints of limited second language knowledge hamper writing because of the need to focus on language rather than content. Second language writing can therefore become more difficult if the two languages are very different

because second language pupils will rely heavily on their first language when writing in a second language because their mother tongue majorly affects the use of second language. Therefore, mistakes in paragraph writing by O' Level pupils in free compositions may be directly influenced by mother tongue interference.

From the above perceptive, the researcher noted that there was a direct relationship between mistakes and effects, and factors in paragraph writing. In light of the proceeding observation, the researcher seeks to contribute to the practical and theoretical conception of paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level pupils.

## **2.2. Related Studies**

### **2.2.1. Paragraphs**

There is a consensus on the perception of paragraphs by different scholars. Generally, a paragraph can be defined as a collection of related sentences that usually deal with a single idea. Connors and Lunsford (2009, p.116) define a paragraph as a group of sentences or a single sentence that form a unit. Their definition set to clarify the misconception that paragraphs are defined in terms of length but the unity and coherence of ideas among sentences. This means that what words are to a sentence is what sentences are to a paragraph.

The unanimity in points of view by scholars is further supported by similarity in the identification of components that make up a paragraph. The essential parts that form a sound paragraph are a topic sentence, supporting sentence which give details, logical order, and concluding sentence (Sattayathan and Ratanapinyowong, 2008). This notion is in line with Connors and Lunsford's (2009) further explanation that in a paragraph a group of sentences support on main idea. The main idea controls what happens in the rest of the paragraph.

In addition, paragraphs must have coherence and unity between the main idea and the supporting details. Despite a unified paragraph and a well-supported paragraph, some paragraphs may still 'sound' choppy unless the writer uses coherence devices to make it smoother (Wyrick, 2010). This means that there is need for smooth flow of transition words or phrases that link one sentence to another in a paragraph.

On the basis of the foregoing studies, the researcher was motivated to carry out the present study in order to find out the extent to which they apply to free composition writing using paragraphs at six selected secondary schools in Mutoko District at O' Level.

### **2.2.2. Previous studies on reasons that could be responsible for the continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level English Language pupils**

The writing process is a complex one and as a result, students are more prone to making mistakes. The most common mistakes are related to grammar. In a study carried by Lunsford and Lunsford (2008), errors on run-on sentences, dangling modifiers, lack of comma in series of sentences, subject-verb agreement and wrong or missing inflected endings among the twenty errors they identified. These errors shows that pupils have difficulties in constructing sound paragraphs as they sometimes fail to recognise where sentences end and write fused sentences.

Another similar study was done by Faisal (2010) who looked at syntactic errors. He identified four main processes which lead to erroneous constructions as omission, substitution, addition and wrong ordering. As a result of additional erroneous constructions, students may write paragraph that are too packed or crowded with many ideas crammed into a single paragraph. This will not only confuse the reader but also cause the writing to be become off-track and unfocused.

In addition, most common errors in paragraph construction include the following: the inclusion of more than one idea in a paragraph, the use of vague or undirected topic sentence and paragraphs which have no sense of direction. Production of such paragraphs weakens the overall composition hence lowers the mark of students. This may make students fail to pass English Language and other English related subjects at O' Level.

Hourani (2008) argued that the learner tries to derive the rules behind the data to which he/she has been exposed and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language. Mother tongue interference subconsciously influences pupils' writing and that may cause them to produce ill-formed sentences as they erroneously apply their knowledge of target language and new structures into new situations. He also noted that in the learning process, learners often experience native language interference from the developmental stage of inter-language. Therefore, mistakes in paragraph writing can be attributed to literal translation of a target language into the mother tongue and then the mother tongue back into target language, word for word and not phrase for phrase. This usually affects grammatical constructions and leaves out the paragraphing mistakes.

The studies carried out by these scholars have simply identified the common errors made by students when writing paragraphs. Little has been done on identification of mistakes and this study seeks to discover reasons why O' Level English Language continue making paragraph writing mistakes.

### **2.2.3. Reasons that affect the ability to construct logical paragraphs**

Paragraphs give structure to a piece of writing. They are a way to organise one's thoughts and give clearness to one's ideas. Since they are used to explain one's argument in stages, it is important to express one idea in each paragraph. Tatira (2005) in *Zimbabwe Journal of Educational Research* (2009, p.86) noted that composition teaching is central to language teaching in Zimbabwe. Most importantly, examinations in Zimbabwe are tested through writing. Therefore, paragraph writing is not only a necessary skill but vital in tackling examinations as paragraphs form the most important component of any written assignment.

The reasons responsible for continued paragraph writing mistakes by students affect the essential qualities of any writing which are unity, coherence and emphasis. Delloto (2011) notes that the duty of a composition teacher is clear and it is to supply a concrete method as the only means to reduce to some kind of order a growing mind woefully chaotic and muddled. This implies that any reason responsible for paragraph writing mistakes leads to increased woefully chaotic and muddled paragraphs which in turn affect pupils' ability to construct coherent and logical compositions.

In addition, the ability to construct logical paragraphs is greatly affected by the pupils who try to cram too many ideas into a single paragraph. Behrens and Risen (2010) and Faisal (2010) conclude that cramming too many ideas into a single paragraph causes pupils' writing to become distractive and conceal its meaning hence confusing the readers. These findings suggest that reasons responsible for writing mistakes greatly affect pupils' ability to construct logical paragraphs which is a necessity for sound composition writing.

Though the above scholars have identified the duty of a composition teacher, they did not look at the practical teaching and learning process. Theoretically, concepts are developed but practically the same concept may be delivered differently by two teachers. This study would seek to find out how the reasons for committing paragraph writing mistakes may affect pupils ability to construct logical ones.

### **2.2.4. Strategies to improve paragraph writing skills in English Language among O' Level pupils in secondary schools**

Zimbabwean Education policy makers have put in place measures that are meant to eradicate paragraph writing mistakes by setting clear objectives on the national English Language syllabus. Candidates must be able to organise their work satisfactory into paragraphs and show a sense of cohesion or coherence within paragraphs (National O' Level English Language Syllabus 2013-2017, p.4). This then forms the backbone of paragraph writing as candidates will be tested on their ability to write continuous narrative, argument and descriptive writing as part of the requirements of Paper 1 of English Language.



To monitor that teachers are guided by the National Syllabi, Heads of Department are currently conducting teacher supervision in their respective schools. Ndebele (2013) views supervision as an important activity that promotes effective teaching in schools. It is through counseling, sharing and supporting teachers that their teaching strategies on paragraph writing skills are improved in the classroom. Practically, the current teacher supervision rests upon the visiting of the classroom and writing some lines in the Head of Department's log book and just checking whether the work has been done according to the set plan or not. This study sought to suggest supervision programmes that thrive to improve the growth of teachers professionally and pupils paragraph writing skills.

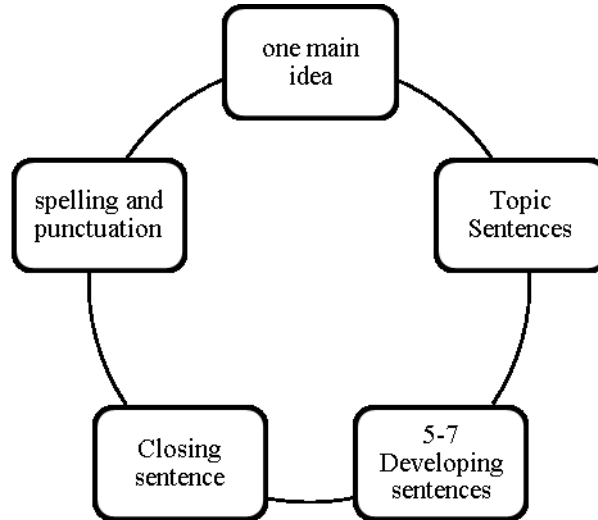
Error analysis has great benefits for both teachers and students. Keshavarz (2008, p.43) concluded that errors are no longer as bad signs of a failure on learning and teaching to be eradicated but they must be seen as a necessary part of language learning process. Describing and classifying errors in linguistic terms, helps in building up of the features of language which are causing the students learning problems. Therefore, scholars and teachers are conducting action researches like this research which theoretically and practically sought ways of reducing mistakes in paragraph writing and make students write sound free paragraphs.

It is worth noting the results of the study by Sarfo-Adu (2013) when he investigated paragraph writing skills among Polytechnic Students at Kumasi Polytechnic. Sarfo-Adu (2013) concluded that it is imperative for schools to strengthen the Languages Department since it is responsible for teaching communication skills and other language related causes to enable them to effectively equip students with the needed paragraph skills for them to improve their academic writing. Providing adequate teaching and learning material, qualified personnel and enough time for thorough revision exercises on paragraphing are suggestions of how school administration may strengthen the Languages Departments for the improvement of free composition writing skills. Theoretically, this research suggested ways in which school administration in Mutoko district may strengthen the Languages Department.

#### **2.2.5. Effectiveness of teaching strategies in teaching paragraph writing skills.**

Dye (2012) drew up a teaching strategy that could help on the construction of paragraphs. He came up with the basics of paragraph writing and devised a step by step approach. The following steps if used by teachers can be very effective in the teaching of paragraphs; 1) student paragraph pretest, 2) the five parts of paragraphs, 3) internalising the five parts, 4) draft paragraph, 5) class writing of paragraph and 6) individual paragraph writing.

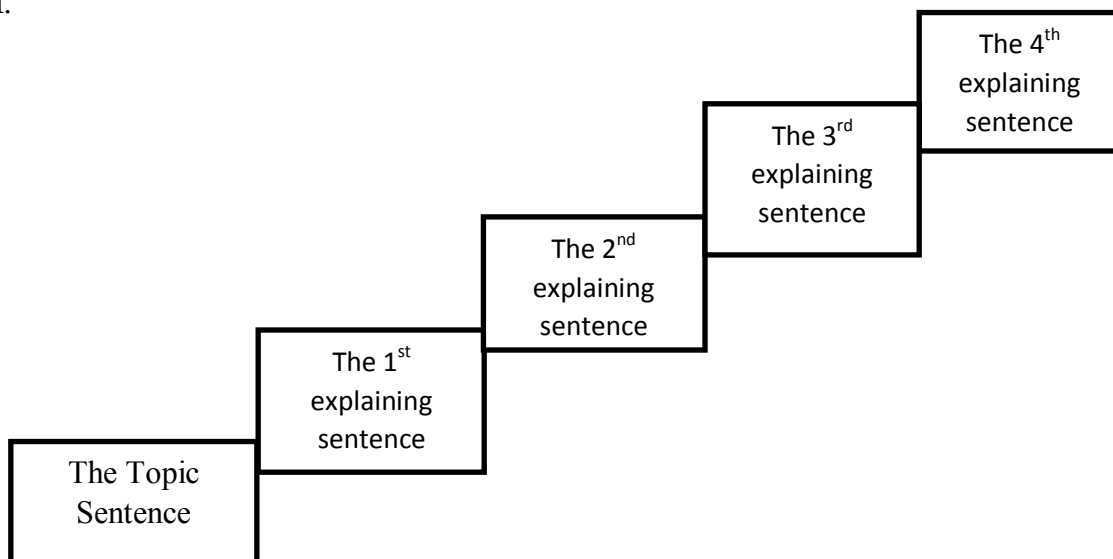
**Figure 1:** The 5 Parts of a Paragraph



Source: Dye (2012, p.6)

He emphasised on continuous practice of the five parts until complete mastery of the concept of paragraph writing is achieved. By doing so, pupils usually develop confidence enough to construct paragraphs on their own. Though this strategy is time consuming, the practice is worth the time.

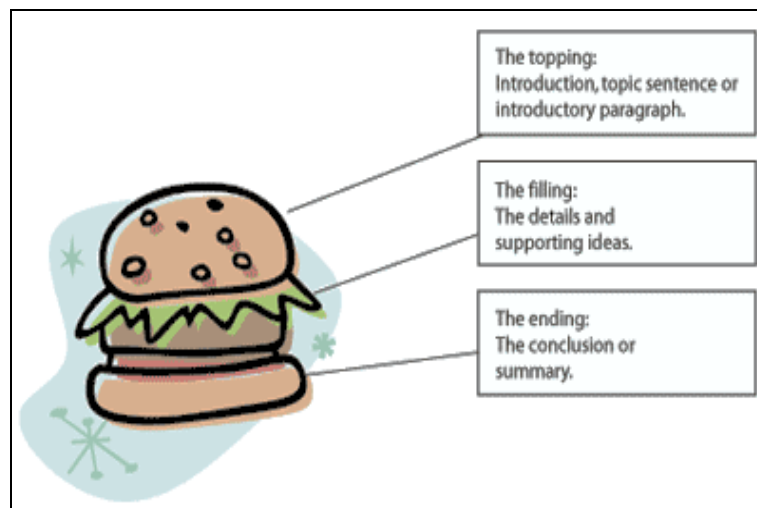
The legendary Alexander Bain championed the prescriptive school of paragraph thought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which was echoed by Rasheed, Marwan and Yazeed (2013) as they looked at paragraph writing and came up with a Step Model of teaching paragraphing. According to them, each step represents one level of maturity and the topic sentence is the first step towards the maturity of the idea. Below is a pictorial representation of the Step Model.



Source: Rasheed et al. (2013)

The Step Model strategy is effective in the teaching of paragraph writing as it formalise paragraph structuring in order that every explaining sentence could speak to the topic sentence, to bring unity and coherence. The same strategy as claimed by Bowman (2009) in Sarfo-Adu (2015, p.147) may not be applicable to all paragraphs as the further a sentence moves away from the topic sentence, the less important or far-fetched and contentious it becomes.

In order to help pupils sequence the information within a paragraph, Richards (2008) in Archer (2010) devised the Hamburger strategy which gives a visual or graphic reminder of the components of a paragraph. The hamburger topping would act as the topic sentence; the filling would be the details and supporting ideas, and the bottom part would be the concluding sentence. The following is the Hamburger teaching strategy:



**Source:** Richards (2008)

The studies on paragraph teaching strategies by Sarfo-Adu (2015), Richards (2008), Rasheed et al. (2013), Archer (2010) and Dye (2012) are all effective in giving concrete visual techniques that are helpful in the structuring of the paragraphs in writing. These, however, do not adequately inform the pupils the reasons why they continuously make mistakes when writing paragraphs in compositions or practically inform pupils what can be done to determine the composition of a particular paragraph. The strategies suggested seem to be ineffective as the pupils' continuously fail to achieve the desired results. This is evidently seen by the low Zimbabwe national overall pass rate for November 2012 which was 18,40 percent, November 2013 pass rate of 20,72 percent and November 2014 pass rate of 22,38 percent. This study sought to assess the effectiveness of teaching strategies employed by teachers and theoretically provided suggestions that could improve paragraph writing skills teaching for O' Level free compositions.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Paradigm

This study utilised qualitative research methodologies which were more concerned with uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in the circumstances in which they find themselves than making judgment about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid (Cole 2006, p.26). Merriam (2009, p.13) highlights that qualitative researchers are more interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and experiences they have in the world.

In this study, the qualitative methodology provided an interpretive paradigm which is associated with the approaches that provide an opportunity for the research participants' voice, concerns and practices on paragraph writing mistakes to be heard. The paragraph writing mistakes and the reasons why pupils continue making them can best be explained by the learners themselves rather than the teachers. Therefore, interpretive or qualitative paradigm gave the researcher more room to investigate through observation, interviews and conversations with research participants what O' Level English language learners think or feel are the reasons for their continued paragraph writing mistakes.

Qualitative paradigm provided a depth of understanding of issues that were not possible through the use of quantitative, statistically-based investigations. Qualitative paradigm is the approach that centralises and places primary value on complete understandings, and how people (the social aspect of our discipline) understand, experience and operate within milieus that are dynamic, and social in their foundation and structure (Tewksbury, 2009). The advantage of interpretive paradigm was that it provided an in-depth understanding of reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes, in-depth assessment of the teaching strategies being used and ways of improving paragraph writing that far exceeds that offered by detached, statistical analyses. Another advantage was that because of the differences in the data, how data is collected and analysed, and what the data and analyses are able to tell the world about the thrust of the study, the knowledge gained through qualitative investigations is more informative, richer and offers enhanced understandings compared to that which can be obtained via quantitative paradigm (Tewksbury, 2009).

Because quantitative or positivist paradigm bases on one existing truth a hypothesis which needs to be proved and with measurable outcomes from questionnaire data, the purpose of this study would have been defied since reasons for continuously making paragraph writing mistakes differ from one person to another. Therefore, qualitative or interpretive paradigm best suited this study.

### **3.2 Research Design**

For the researcher to gain different perceptions and draw attention to various reasons that make pupils continue making paragraph writing mistakes when writing free compositions, case study research design was employed in this study. According Chirimuuta et al. (2013), case studies are a type of qualitative research in which the researcher explores a single phenomenon bounded by time and activity and collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period. Case study research design has an advantage that it uses multiple data collection techniques. This research used the following methods of data generation; these are unstructured interview, analysis of documents like language policy, national syllabus, pupils' composition exercise books, and participatory observation of teaching methods used by teachers. The interviews were conducted in private settings that were convenient to the selected interviewees. Another advantage is that case study research design does not seek to make generalisations and theories but this is achieved by collecting extensive data against which research findings are verified. The researcher got the opportunity to interact with participants and saw issues and unveiled the reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes from the participants as they experienced writing mistakes.

The disadvantage of case studies is on case study questions. Case studies are most suitable for 'how' and 'why' types of research questions. Before getting ready to conduct a case study, the observer should have the questions articulated (Breslin and Buchanan, 2008). This is the most time consuming part of case study design upon which the success depends, and thus the formulation of research question will be done meticulously with the support from the supervisor. To avoid bias the researcher in this study used triangulation technique which requires data from multiple sources of evidence, using multiple data collection techniques to converge. That helped to remove any biases induced by researcher's subjectivity. Triangulation works better with a case study than any other form of quantitative research method, as they use only one data collection method.

### **3.3 Population**

The population that was used in this research was drawn from six selected secondary schools within three clusters from Mutoko District. The researcher used two English language teachers from the six selected secondary schools in Mutoko District and four pupils from each selected school and in total, 12 teachers and 24 pupils were used as the research sample. 24 pupils and 12 teachers accepted to offer information on paragraph writing mistakes. It was very important that the three research clusters that were selected for this study had at least two secondary schools and the schools were offering English Language at

O' Level to both Form 3 and Form 4 students who were also required to write the subject as part of the Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination requirements to have a complete General Certificate of Education at the end of their two year course.

### **3.4 Sampling**

To obtain participants for this study, the researcher used non probability sampling specifically convenient sampling because he intended to collect data from three of the eight clusters within Mutoko District and from within these clusters, he targeted six schools, that is, two schools from each cluster. This sampling method was advantageous in that it ease the research process and facilitates data collection in a short duration of time which was cost effective given that the research study was self-funded from the researcher's salary and that could have posed a problem as the researcher had to travel to the schools and clusters to collect data.

However, convenience sampling is vulnerable to selection bias and sampling error. To avoid selection bias, the researcher in this study used triangulation technique which required data from multiple sources of evidence, using multiple data collection techniques to converge. That assisted in removing any biases induced by researcher's subjectivity.

### **3.5. Data Collection tools**

The following methods were used to collect data because the study was qualitative in its outlook:

- a) unstructured interview;
- b) participatory observation;
- c) conversation; and
- d) analysis of documents like Languages policy, national syllabus and examiners' report.

#### **3.5.1. Interviews**

The researcher conducted at least two interviews with each selected student and teacher from the schools designated from the three clusters identified for this study. The participants typically completed each version of interview question in about three to six minutes. At this point, the researcher interviewed each student participants for some thirty-five minutes. The students had to respond to four questions on bio-data and six questions seeking actually data for the research. The teacher participants were interviewed for about fifty-five minutes using a semi-structured format to elicit reactions to a few standard questions before probing subjects' responses. The teachers had to respond to eight bio-data questions and nine questions as the researcher sought the actual data for this research. These interviews form

the core of this study and focused on each participant's reactions to paragraph writing mistakes, though the conversation would naturally broaden at times.

All questions were primarily designed to uncover the understanding of paragraph writing skills and reasons why participants continued making paragraph writing mistakes. Most participants did find paragraph writing mistakes bothersome. Understanding why a person would react in one way or another was difficult if not impossible to determine absolutely. In particular, interviewees might simply said whatever they believed they were expected to say, so the researcher followed normal interview practices that of helping to create a relaxed atmosphere conducive to forthright, honest communication.

However, the interview results were pieces of a discussion and cannot be taken as absolute proof of what was going on in the participant's minds. After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher firstly analysed each transcription for its major concern and later considered how these might be refined and synthesised.

### **3.5.2. Observation**

The researcher observed teachers conducting lessons on paragraph writing skills in particular teacher's introduction of paragraph writing concept, teacher-student interaction, student engagement, teacher's communication skills and strategies in illustrating the concept as well as the assignments that were given after. The researcher managed to conduct at least two lesson observations for each teacher participant. See Appendix VII on page 97 for sample observation.

### **3.5.3. Languages Policy, National Syllabus and Examiners' Report Review**

In this research, the researcher reviewed the Languages Departmental Policies of each school selected, the English Language examiners' report and the National O' Level English Language Syllabus. It was necessary for the researcher to review these documents because they provided guidance for the teachers of English Language on the teaching and learning procedures, teaching methods and strategies in paragraph writing as well as the objectives of the teaching of English Language as a foreign language to Zimbabwean students.

The purpose of each document review is to provide a behind-the-scenes look at a program that may not be directly observable. (Cowling, 2007) For this research study the intention of reviewing the national syllabus and Languages Policies was to evaluate the policies and objectives already in place for teachers in the teaching of writing skills specifically paragraph writing skills. The Examiners' reports may bring up issues not noted by other means (Cowling, 2007) and that also helped the researcher in assessing the

effectiveness of strategies that were being used by English Languages teachers in teaching of paragraph writing skills and free composition writing.

### **3.6. Data Collection Procedures**

Before embarking on data collection, the researcher sought permission in writing to conduct research in the schools from the District Education Office, the respective Heads, Languages Department office bearers, and participants of the six secondary schools that were used when carrying out the study. The researcher made necessary arrangements for interviews, observations, discussion sessions and document analysis.

Prior to lesson observations, the researcher designed observation criteria. This was as follows; if the researcher observed that there was sufficient interaction between the pupils and subject teachers, the researcher recorded extent by awarding a 3 (three) for a greater extent, a 2 (two) to some extent and a 1(one) if there was no interaction at all. That criterion was also used where students were given the opportunity to engage with each other, that is, group work and pair work on paragraph writing skills.

After the lessons, the researcher and the subject teachers went to rooms that were convenient to the research participants where we discussed the way the teacher delivered the lesson on writing skills. The researcher allowed the subject teacher to make a self-evaluation of his or her performance in view of lesson delivery on paragraph writing skills methods. During these discussions, the researcher asked questions and that formed the basis of the interviews for teachers. The responses to the questions were recorded verbatim by the researcher as the research participants spoke and the researcher had a chance to probe further in areas where he felt more information could be extracted. Interview guides were also be used.

Lesson observation on paragraph writing skills were made, the outcome was fruitful as the researcher managed to observe successfully the teaching methods employed by the teachers and noted some of the origins or factors that made pupils continue making paragraph writing mistakes.

#### **3.6.1 Ethical Considerations**

When carrying out this research, the researcher was very cautious so that he would not have infringed on the rights of the participants he used to solicit information from. The researcher must seek informed consent of the participants and permission (Heppener et al., 1998 in Shumbayawonda, 2011) so the researcher in this study sought informed consent and permission from the school authorities whose schools were included in the study. Besides, seeking permission from participants and school authorities, the researcher ensured that the



participants' right to privacy was strictly observed during and after the data generation process. The researcher avoided at all cost observing participants and write notes on their paragraph writing mistakes without the permission as that was regarded as violation of their privacy, respect and integrity.

Lastly, the researcher tried by all means to be accurate in his research, that is, avoided producing false and distorting results in the finding. Since the study fell under educational research, the researcher was guided by ethical codes and guidelines that promoted human welfare, potential and uniqueness of individuals and served the society he resided in. The researcher also sought publication credit to show that the research was considering scholarly work.

## **4. Findings**

### **4.1. Teachers bio-data**

Among the twelve teachers selected for this study, the researcher noted that four were holders of Bachelor of Arts Degree in English and Communication Skills only, three were holders of Bachelor of Arts General Degree only, two had Bachelor of Arts Degree and a Post Graduate Diploma in Education and lastly three teachers had Diplomas in Education (Secondary). The researcher discovered that seven out of twelve teachers lacked the pedagogies of teaching and they may be tempted to impart academic knowledge to pupils without taking into consideration the effects of delivering lessons to a variety of pupils whose abilities differ. The knowledge of teaching pedagogies equips the teachers with an appropriate teaching strategy that best fits the capacity of the pupils and a result bring desired goals.

Finally, the researcher noted that seven of the selected teachers were males and five were females and the researcher wondered why this was so. From the researcher's experience, he has noted that female students were good at Art subjects particularly English Language and Literature but in this study, there were more males than females.

#### **4.1.1. Pupils bio-data**

The researcher was fortunate enough to find a fifty-fifty representative of the pupils who participated in this study. Twelve of the participants were female pupils and exactly half of them were male pupils. That provided the researcher with an equal number of representatives from both sex and the data collected from the participants would be a fair representation of gender in terms of reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes.

## 4.2 Interviews

This section presents research findings narratively. Qualitative studies of this magnitude render themselves in narrative data presentation because they give the reader a sense of being present at the research site when the research was being conducted (Thomas and Nelson 2001).

### 4.2.1. Summary of findings on the interviews on reasons for continued paragraph writing from pupils

Generally, the interviewees responded very well to the questions asked. All of the responses showed that all the pupils interviewed were aware of the factors and reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes. They all acknowledged that pupils continuously made mistakes in paragraphing to a great extent. Some of them even made mention that even when placed in groups; pupils cannot construct coherent and cohesive paragraphs.

This study was guided by the following questions drawn from the sub-problems in chapter 1:

- A. What is a paragraph?
- B. Do you always make paragraph writing mistakes? If so what kind of mistakes do you always find yourself doing?
- C. What do you think are the factors or reasons that make you continue making paragraph writing mistakes?
- D. What methods does your teacher use in teaching paragraph writing skills?
- E. Which books does your teacher recommend you to read on paragraph writing skills?
- F. To what extent are the recommended texts for paragraph writing skills available?

In line with the sub-problems, the researcher made a narrative presentation of each and analysed the responses made from the interviews conducted from the student participants as follows:

#### **A. Some of the unordered list of responses from students, what is a paragraph?**

In their responses to the question; what is a paragraph? The participants indicated the following:

- "...a group of sentences with developers which supports the topic sentence";
- "...a group of words put together in sentences which support a topic sentence";
- "...a group of sentences combined together to make sense";
- "...a group of sentences describing a topic sentence";

#### **B. Some of the unordered list of responses from students, do you always make paragraph writing mistakes? If so what kind of mistakes do you always find yourself making?**

In their responses to the question, do you always make paragraph writing mistakes? If so what kind of mistakes do you always find yourself making? The participants indicated the following:

- *“Sometimes, and I usually mix many topic sentences in one paragraph.”*
- *“Yes, I write many sentences in one paragraph making it too big.”*
- *“Yes, writing of meaningless sentences which do not support the topic sentence.”*
- *“Yes, I usually run out of ideas and fail to support my central idea.”*
- *“Sometimes I forget to write developers along main idea in the topic sentence.”*
- *“I introduce the topic sentence in the middle of the paragraph which makes it awkward.”*
- *“Omit very important supporting ideas and realize it later forcing me to just throw them in any paragraph when the ideas pop up.”*

**C. Some of the unordered list of responses from students, what do you think are the factors or reasons that make you continue making paragraph writing mistakes?**

The student participants had the following to say about what they thought were the factors that made them continue making paragraph writing mistakes:

- *“Too lazy to follow the prescribed paragraph format.”*
- *“Mother tongue interference as I try to change what I know from Shona directly to English Language.”*
- *“Speed in writing as I try to meet teachers’ deadline and save myself any punishment.”*
- *“Mixing of ideas without knowing where the sentence ends mainly because of Shona-English translation.”*
- *“Because I use speed when writing my compositions.”*
- *“Having too many ideas or points to support the topic sentence such that I want to include everything I know in the paragraph.”*
- *“It just lack of practice because once the teacher’s essay has been submitted I forget about paragraphing.”*
- *“Usually I run out of words and ideas during the paragraph writing and end up writing undeveloped paragraphs.”*

**D. What methods does your teacher use in teaching paragraph writing skills?**

The researcher discovered that most of the participants indicated that their teachers use the lecture method as it helps them to grasp quickly the concept of paragraphing. The teachers usually have a copy of a model paragraph which has all the required components or elements of paragraph writing. However, some of them argued that the model paragraphs which were usually used by teachers to demonstrate how paragraphs were written were too simple and straight forward but when it comes to practical writing difficulties arise as they failed to find appropriate supporting sentences or ideas to develop

the central idea. Secondly, the researcher also discovered that group co-operative methods were sometimes used but the problem arose when fast learners were mixed with slow learners. The fast learners had a tendency of keeping quiet leaving the slow learners making noise and the purpose is defeated. Lastly, the researcher discovered that some of the teachers resort to giving a lot of paragraph writing exercises and when they have marked the compositions they hardly comment on the paragraphing their pupils would have made. This reviewed that the teachers' methods vary when teaching paragraph writing skills.

#### **E. Which books does your teacher recommend you to read on paragraph writing skills?**

Most of the participants indicated that their teachers recommended the following texts:

- *Focus Study Aids ZJC English* by G. Matindike and E. McLoughlin.
- *Step Ahead New Secondary English* by S. Chinodya.
- *Focus on English* by I. Berger.
- Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination English Language Green Books.
- Novels.
- Newspapers.
- Magazines.

The researcher was prompted immediately to ask the last question on availability of the texts recommended by the teachers and noted that in the selected six secondary schools, *Step Ahead New Secondary English* by Shimmer Chinodya was readily available to pupils' disposal as they were part of the Education Transition Fund lot that was distributed to all secondary schools across the country. The researcher was pleased to note that in all these selected six secondary school, the textbook to pupil ratio was one to one except for cases where pupils would have lost them because of irresponsibility. These findings add novel insights into effective paragraph writing by O' Level pupils since existing literature has not managed to suggest possible textbooks that can enhance effective composition writing using paragraphs.

#### **4.2.2. Summary of findings on the interviews on reasons for continued paragraph writing from teachers**

Similarly, to the pupil participants, the teacher participants responded very well to the questions asked. All of the responses showed that all the teachers interviewed were aware of the factors and reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes and were concerned about pupils who constantly repeated paragraph writing mistakes. They also acknowledged that their pupils continuously made mistakes in paragraphing greatly. Some of them even made

mention that even with constant revision, emphasis on the demands of paper one; pupils cannot construct coherent and cohesive paragraphs.

This study was guided by the following questions derived from research questions given in chapter 1:

1. What is a paragraph?
2. Do your students always make paragraph writing mistakes? If so what kind of mistakes do they always do?
3. What do you think are the factors or reasons that make pupils continuing making paragraph writing mistakes?
4. What methods do you use in teaching paragraph writing skills?
5. How effective are your teaching strategies in teaching paragraph writing skills?
6. Which books do you recommend your students to read on paragraph writing skills?
7. To what extend are the recommended texts for paragraph writing skills available?
8. What do you think can be done to improve paragraph writing skills?
9. What is your observation on National policy on writing skills or composition writing at O' Level?

In line with the sub-problems, the researcher made a narrative presentation of each and analysed the responses made from the interviews conducted from the teacher participants as follows:

#### **A. Some of the unordered list of responses from students, what is a paragraph?**

The teachers seem to tally with the pupils' responses and indicated the following:

- *"...a group of sentences that are related and express a common idea";*
- *"...it should have a topic sentence and supporting sentences, and the sentence is the thesis statement";*
- *"...a series of well-constructed sentences in support of the topic sentence and they are in unity to express a certain idea";*
- *"...well, it depends on the level but generally it is a unit of several sentences with one main idea";*
- *"...a group of sentences combined together to support the topic sentence";* and
- *"...it can be described as a sub unit of a broad idea".*

The researcher observed that the definitions of a paragraph given by the pupil participants were quite similar to those given by their teachers hence the researcher did not bother to enumerate the findings. From the teachers' definitions, the researcher noted that a paragraph may be defined as a series of well-constructed sentences that support one broad idea which is found in the topic sentence. The supporting sentences must develop the main idea smoothly so that a paragraph becomes logical and coherent. These findings corresponds

with the definition by Sattayathan and Ratanapinyowong (2008) which drew up the essential parts that form a sound paragraph as a topic sentence, supporting sentences which give details, logical order, and concluding sentence. On the basis of the findings, the definition of a paragraph is not either teacher-bound or pupil-bound.

**B. Some of the unordered list of responses from teachers, do your students always make paragraph writing mistakes? If so, what kind of mistakes do they always do?**

The teacher participants had the following to say on whether their students always made paragraph writing mistakes and the kind of mistakes they always do if there were any:

- *“Students are weak in constructing sentences, creating sentences and adhering to standard structure of a paragraph.”*
- *“Students mostly translate Shona made sentences into English Language hence their grammar lives a lot to be desired.”*
- *“At times the notion of paragraphing is not thought of as pupils rush into completing assigned work in time.”*

The mistakes committed by students from the teachers' point of view were mainly in the construction of sentences. The researcher noted that the construction of sentences was a sole responsibility of teachers as they were the ones in charge of imparting writing skills to the pupils.

**C. What do you think are the factors or reasons that make pupils continue making paragraph writing mistakes?**

The responses from the teachers were to those of pupils as the researcher noted that lack of ideas, running out of ideas, laziness, and complacency and rushing to complete the work given were cited as the main reasons for pupils' failure to construct coherent and logical paragraphs. Most teachers complained about the negative attitude of the pupils as it contributed greatly to their continued paragraph writing mistakes. Some teachers cited pupils who seem over confident and too reluctant when it comes to paragraph writing skills but end up writing illogical paragraphs because of complacency. The researcher also learnt that as cited by the pupils themselves, pupils rush to complete their given work and as a result fail to recognise the rules that govern paragraph construction.

**D. What methods do you use in teaching paragraph writing skills?**

Most teachers highlighted that they make use of hamburger paragraph teaching method as it gave a pictorial view of what they mean by paragraphing and the concept of using food as bait, most pupils listen attentively. The researcher noted that the method was very effective but the pupils may fail to know what should be writing in support of the topic sentences as they might run out of ideas. Richards (2008) in Archer (2010)'s hamburger strategy surely summed up the findings of this research by pointing out that the hamburger

topping would act as the topic sentence; the filling would be the details and supporting ideas, and the bottom part would be the concluding sentence.

#### **E. How effective are your teaching strategies in teaching paragraph writing skills?**

As has been noted in the research interview question number 4, teachers used collaborative teaching and learning methods and the methods seem to be more effective in the teaching of paragraphing skills. The researcher noted that the use of group work as a cooperative and collaborative method in the learning process made the team members indebted to rely on one another to achieve the desired goals on paragraphing skills. Every member in the group knew that any group members' failure to do his part meant that everyone suffers the consequences therefore every pupil was obliged to contribute meaningfully to the discussions in order to maximize their learning. Archer (2010) and Dye (2012) agree that the strategy of filling the paragraph with details and supporting ideas requires team effort so that concrete structures are created hence the use of collaborative methods.

#### **F. Which books do you recommend your students to read on paragraph writing skills?**

Most of the participants indicated that they recommended the following texts:

- *Focus Study Aids ZJC English* by G. Matindike and E. McLoughlin.
- *Step Ahead New Secondary English* by S. Chinodya.
- *Focus on English* by I. Berger.
- *Evergreen with Reading* by Fawcett and Sandberg.
- *Writing Worth Reading* by Timpane.
- *Basic English Revisited* by Sebranek Meyer.

The researcher was also prompted immediately to ask the question on availability of the texts recommended and noted that in the selected six secondary schools, *Evergreen with Reading* by Fawcett and Sandberg, *Writing Worth Reading* by Timpane and *Basic English Revisited* by Sebranek Meyer were teachers' resource texts and were hardly available for the pupils. The researcher also noted that *Step Ahead New Secondary English* by S. Chinodya was readily available to pupils' disposal as they were part of the Education Transition Fund lot that was distributed to all secondary schools across the country.

#### **G. What do you think can be done to improve paragraph writing skills?**

In the interviews, most teachers suggested the use of scaffolding, brainstorming and collaborative teaching methods as ways that could be used to improve paragraph writing skills. With scaffolding, teachers would provide students with a temporary framework for learning. Explaining how scaffolding works one teacher cited Lawson, (2002) who purported that students are encouraged to develop their own creativity, motivation, and resourcefulness by they gather knowledge and increase their skills on their own thereby

dismantling relying on the teacher as the fountain of knowledge. At the completion of the lesson, the scaffolding is removed altogether and students no longer need it. Another teacher said,

*“Scaffolding is an instructional technique whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy of paragraphs and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students.”*

By so doing, pupils would be able to create their own cohesive and logical paragraphs well in time for the final examination.

Other teachers felt that brainstorming and collaborative learning methods provide a support structure to the students to enable certain activities and skills to develop. Archer (2010) and Dye (2012) support the notion as well.

#### **H. What is your observation on National policy on writing skills or composition writing at O' Level?**

Citing the national syllabus verbatim, most teachers showed that the policy on paragraphing was quite clear and straight forward as it evidently stated the writing skill objective that, the Candidate should be able to organize their work satisfactorily into paragraphs and show a sense of cohesion or coherence within paragraphs (Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination English Language Syllabus 2013, p.5).

Some teachers cited item **3.1d** and **3.1e** which required the pupils to write coherent and cohesive paragraphs which are clear and well-structured; and to link paragraphs logically and skillfully using discourse markers where appropriate. This finding goes along with Gwarinda (2002)'s definition and role of the national syllabus which said that it should provide a planned course of instruction.

#### **4.3 Lesson observation**

During the lesson observation, the researcher actively took down notes, following the observation criterion drafted before. Whenever the teachers introduced the lesson objectives of paragraph writing or interaction between teachers and pupils or group work among pupils and or use of teaching Aids, the researcher recorded extent by awarding a 3 (three) for a greater extent, a 2 (two) to some extent and a 1(one) if there was no interaction at all and made necessary comments.

The researcher observed that sentence construction and knowledge of the immediate components of a sentence was vital in identifying the main idea in a topic sentence. These discoveries do not tally with Delloto (2011)'s duties of a composition teacher as merely suggesting that pupils should support or develop their sentences with other sentences



without effectively teaching them how each idea could be supported or developed is chaotic and muddling. The teacher should not prescribe what pupils should learn regarding paragraph writing. Instead, pupils should be given the latitude to display creative and original writing skills so that they become open minded and agile in their thinking during the examinations.

#### **4.4 Document Analysis**

The researcher noted that the official syllabus clearly outlined that one of the major aims of that document was to provide the opportunity for pupils to obtain sufficient understanding and knowledge of the English Language in order to express themselves creatively in imaginative writing (Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination English Language Syllabus 2013, p.4). Having discovered that the syllabus had clearly outlined that aim, the researcher went on to ask himself how pupils would be able to obtain such understanding and knowledge on creative writing. Continued perusal of the syllabus revealed that there were assessment objectives which clearly put across the skills which may be assessed by public examinations. The objectives included appropriate use of register and writing skills among others. The researcher gladly noted that for examination purposes, pupils should be able to organise their work satisfactorily into paragraphs and show a sense of coherence or cohesion within paragraphs. Because this research study intended to investigate reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level pupils, the researcher was propelled further to peruse the document to unveil the strategies that were in place for teachers in order for them to successfully teach paragraph writing skills.

In relation to paragraph writing mistakes, the national syllabus highlighted that it was vital to solve mistakes which are common to many pupils with the whole class. This meant that it recommended group discussions and class discussions as methods that engage pupils in identifying a common class problem. The syllabus also highlighted that teachers should avoid teaching pupils about common errors that is, bringing to the pupils attention errors which pupils do not make or encounter. That usually confuses pupils as the errors would be new to them. However, the researcher noted that pupils should be encouraged to widen and deepen their understanding of how to use language creatively and with variety through wide reading, and identifying and mastering the structures, they come across in comprehension passages and books they read. The researcher concluded that a comprehension passage is a composition written by another person and therefore, it has all the components of a piece of writing that has well-planned paragraphs. That meant that as pupils master the structures they come across in comprehension passages they also master the process of planning paragraphs as they write their own free compositions. This is so

because paragraph writing and paragraph analysis support each other and if one is able to do good paragraph analysis, he or she could do good paragraph planning. These findings go along with Gwarinda (2002)'s definition and role of the national syllabus that of providing a planned course of instruction.

However, the national syllabus did not elaborate further on how pupils could come up with a coherent, competent and logical paragraph. The strategies that could be used by English Language teachers on paragraph writing skills and free compositions depend on professional development and academic qualifications.

Having reviewed the national syllabus on writing skills, the researcher was prompted to review the Languages departmental policies as these would lay out policies for each specific secondary school selected for the study to implement the aims and objectives of the official national syllabus. All the selected six secondary schools languages policies set minimum standards on work that should be given to pupils in line with the demands of the national syllabus. Of importance, the researcher noted that teachers were supposed to give one composition every fortnight and the Heads of Departments designed inspection schedules which guided them when supervising the teaching and learning process. The schedules included exercise book inspection, lesson observation among others. The researcher discovered that the Languages policies guided all English Language to follow the aims and objectives of the national syllabus.

The Languages policies also highlighted that school syllabi were crafted in such a way that the aims and objectives were in line with the scope and sequence of the official syllabus. The researcher caught a glimpse at some of the English language school syllabi and identified similarities with the national syllabus, for instance, the aspect of writing coherent and cohesive paragraphs which are well structured and clear. These documents reviewed that English Language teachers were well guided on the teaching and learning procedures, the teaching methods and strategies in paragraph writing as well as the objectives of the teaching of English Language as a foreign language to Zimbabwean students. These documents complemented one another.

## **5. Discussion**

The researcher categorised the participants' responses into three groups. The groups were based on pupils' personal practices, teachers' practices and the educational system. The three categories were as follows:

Cassim Silumba, Tichaona Mapolisa  
 REASONS FOR CONTINUED PARAGRAPH WRITING MISTAKES BY O' LEVEL PUPILS IN  
 ENGLISH LANGUAGE FREE COMPOSITION WRITING IN SELECTED SIX SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM  
 THREE CLUSTERS IN MUTOKO DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

Indicative categories	Participant Responses
Pupil practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I think <i>lack of ideas</i> to write as most of us what to respond to topics that are unfamiliar to us.</li> <li>• <i>Running out of ideas</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Complacence</i>, I think is the most important reason why we make paragraph writing mistakes.</li> <li>• Because I use <i>speed when writing</i> my compositions.</li> <li>• <i>Too lazy</i> to follow the prescribed paragraph format.</li> <li>• <i>Speed in writing</i> as I try to meet teachers' deadline and save myself any punishment.</li> </ul>
Teacher based practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mostly our <i>language grammar</i> affects the way we write paragraphs as we tend to mix mother language and English Language resulting in <i>teachers underlining</i> the whole sentence and write <i>gr</i> to show that our grammar is bad.</li> <li>• I think it is all because of <i>little understanding of paragraphs</i>.</li> <li>• <i>Having too many ideas or points to support the topic sentence</i> such that I want to include everything I know in the paragraph.</li> <li>• <i>Mixing of ideas without knowing where the sentence ends</i> mainly because of Shona-English translation.</li> <li>• Failure to know <i>what my topic sentence is all about</i> hence will end up failing to develop or arrange my developers well.</li> <li>• <i>Mother tongue interference</i> as I try to change what I know from Shona directly to English Language.</li> </ul>
Educational system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Lack of concrete ideas</i> to support the topic sentence.</li> <li>• I think <i>lack of ideas</i> to write as most of us what to respond to <i>topics that are unfamiliar</i> to us.</li> </ul>

The placed the responses into indicative categories such that the reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes could rightfully points to the system or person responsible. These were identified as pupils' personal practice, teacher made and education system.

Of the responses, the researcher noted that lack of ideas, running out of ideas, laziness, and complacence and rushing to complete the work given were all emanating from pupils' personal practice. The attitude of the pupils contributed greatly to their need to learn paragraph writing skills and once they become lazy, they were likely to fail to write coherent and cohesive paragraphs whenever they attempt free composition writing. Some of the pupils were over confident that they can construct logical paragraphs but end up writing illogical one because of complacence. These pupils seem to have a lot of information that could be used to support the topic sentences in their paragraphs but they end up including unnecessary information in their writings and eventually continue making paragraph mistakes. The researcher also noted that pupils rush to complete the work given by their teachers and as a result fail to recognize the rules that govern paragraph construction. All

these reasons pointed to the pupil as the source and responsible for continued paragraph writing mistakes.

Besides holding the pupils responsible for continually making their own mistakes in paragraphing, the researcher discovered that teachers of English Language also contributed to the pupils' failure to construct meaningful and coherent paragraphs. Failure by pupils know what the topic sentence was all about; mixing of ideas without knowing where the sentence ends and mother tongue interference were supposed to be corrected by teachers during the teaching and learning of paragraph writing skills. The researcher noted that it was the teachers' responsibility to correct, teach and educate the pupils on how to write coherent and meaningful paragraphs. However, teachers should not stick to the amount of written work as prescribed by education circular number 36 of 2006 which stipulated the minimum number of work given to pupils. Thoroughly execution of teaching methods and strategies of paragraph writing skills may see mistakes in mother tongue interference being reduced. These findings are in agreement with Delloto's (2011) findings when he defined the role of a composition teacher as noted above.

The researcher also noted that pupils sometimes were fascinated by attention-grabbing topics such that they perform dismally in writing of paragraphs which result in their failure to perfect their compositions. The researcher probed the teachers why they should not just teach narrative type of composition writing instead of teaching all the types prescribed in the syllabus. Some teachers felt that that would be a criminal offense as they were supposed to adhere and religiously follow the demands of the national syllabus. Such findings made the researcher to conclude that ministerial policies also played a role in pupils continued paragraph writing mistakes.

The researcher noted that with paragraphing, pupils may be asked to develop topic sentences by using examples, illustrations and or reasons to support the central idea in class. By so doing, pupils would be provided with assistance in moment-to-moment interaction. That type of interaction made learning a social process and not an individual one, and students would be forced to interact with their teacher and with one another in the classroom. As pupils interact with each other and the teacher, they would enjoy better chances of clarifying their ideas, mutually correcting their linguistic misconceptions, inadequacies and deficiencies than those who resent interaction. Therefore, group work is central to language development of pupils searching for effective composition writing skills.

The researcher noted that national syllabus undoubtedly outlined what pupils should be able to do after acquiring writing skills and unanimously, teachers were quite aware of the demands of the syllabus, hence, the researcher felt that it was the responsibility of the teachers in the implementation of the national syllabus. Teachers who lack effective syllabus

interpretation, expertise, skills and competencies are a detriment to paragraph writing and ultimately to free composition writing by O' Level pupils.

### **5.1. Summary**

In this research study, the researcher found out that with regard to the first research question on reasons that could be responsible for the continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level English Language pupils, they sometimes run out of ideas, fail to come up with one concrete idea, fail to organise the structure of their paragraphs coherently and they were heavily affected by mother tongue interference. Moreover, English Language teachers also contribute to the continued paragraph writing mistakes by using mother tongue in their teaching, disregard communicative marking and incompetency. The reasons suggested in this study greatly affected the construction of logical paragraphs for pupils ended up with chaotic and muddled ones. The researcher also discovered that there was need for teachers to use scaffolding, brainstorming and collaborative teaching methods so that the pupils may develop their own creativity. That buttressed the effectiveness of the already existing strategies being employed in the classroom. Among the strategies were collaborative, co-operative and appreciation methods which fostered participation by every student in the group. The methods were also effective as students responses on paragraphs were shared within team members and they developed logical and coherent paragraphs.

### **5.2. Conclusion of the findings**

The study came up with four major conclusions that were based on the researcher's findings which emanated from the sub-problems. First, the researcher concluded that the possible reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' Level English Language pupils are diverse and vary from one student to another. Therefore, the factors and reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes discovered in this researcher are inadequate and inconclusive. They may also be dependent on individual student perceptions, teachers' view and education system in a given locality.

With regard to the second question, the researcher concluded that the reasons have a direct impact on the students' ability to construct logical paragraphs.

Third, the researcher concluded that team effort is of paramount importance in the improvement of paragraph writing skills in English Language among O' Level pupils through collaborative and co-operative learning.

Last, the researcher concluded that setting of too many types of compositions tend to confuse pupils as eye-catching topics are thrown on free composition writing during the examination and use of Zimbabwe Secondary School Examination English Language paper

one as the yardstick to measure competency in pupils writing skills has a detrimental effect on paragraph writing skills.

### 5.3 Recommendations

Having come up with a number of reasons for continued paragraph writing mistakes by O' level pupils in English Language free composition writing in selected six secondary schools from three clusters in Mutoko District, this study suggests the following as solutions to the problem.

- Pupils should develop a broad background by reading how newspaper article, magazine stories and English novels are written so that they become proficient with writing skills.
- It is important that pupils are taught the structures of paragraphs using the hamburger method, step model, the five part model among others write coherent and logical paragraphs.
- It is also important that pupils build a good vocabulary and sentence construction skills by making use of the dictionary regularly and language practice sessions right from ZJC level.
- English Language teachers should motivate and create interest in pupils because the stronger the interest, the better the pupils' writing skills.
- The use of scaffolding by the teachers in the teaching of paragraph writing helps the second language learner to acquire the sense of correcting their own work through the editing process or helping in peer edition.
- The use of continuous assessment by Zimbabwe Schools Examination Council (ZIMSEC) in which pupils work is marked and the assessment marks contribute a certain percentage of the final mark should be introduced.

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REASONS FOR CONTINUED PARAGRAPH WRITING MISTAKES BY O' LEVEL PUPILS IN  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE FREE COMPOSITION WRITING IN SELECTED SIX SECONDARY SCHOOLS FROM  
THREE CLUSTERS IN MUTOKO DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE

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