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## Challenges teachers and students face in using the integrated writing skills approach: Evidence from schools in Bungoma North, Kenya

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges that teachers and learners of English encountered in using integrated writing skills approach in teaching and learning of writing in Bungoma North District. Based on the study, this paper examines the challenges teachers of English face in utilizing the integrated writing skills approach in teaching writing and the challenges learners of English face in utilizing the integrated writing skills approach in learning writing. Swain's Output Hypothesis of second language learning and the process theory of language learning guided this study. Swain argues that the act of producing a language (speaking or writing), constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of language learning. Output is important in language learning and the learner has to be given enough time to produce new structures of the target language based on the application and practice of what he/she has heard. The study used descriptive survey design, which is suitable for studying behaviour, attitudes, values and characteristics. The study was carried out in Bungoma North District, which had 50 secondary schools at the time of study. Out of these, 5 were boys' schools, 8 were girls' schools and 37 were mixed secondary schools. However, stratified random sampling was used to select only 20 secondary schools, which formed 40% of the population of the schools. Simple random sampling was used to select 200 Form Three students and then purposive sampling was used to select 20 teachers of English from the selected schools. Questionnaires, interviews and observation schedules were used to collect data. Data collected was analyzed descriptively using measures of central tendencies, including mean, mode and median. The data was then presented in tables, graphs and pie charts. The study established that the main challenges in using this approach by both teachers and the learners were that the learners' language level was very low; the approach called for more time than the time allocated for writing. Moreover, some of the schools did not have enough texts to be used by both teachers and students. It was, therefore, recommended that teachers should use integrated writing skills approach extensively in teaching writing. Teachers should also carefully plan to teach writing.

**Keywords:** Challenges Teachers, Students, Integrated Writing Skills Approach, Kenya

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. The Concept of Language Output

The output hypothesis is a language learning theory that was developed by Swain in 1985. It claims that the act of producing language (speaking or writing) constitutes, under certain circumstances, part of the process of second language learning. Swain (1985) argues that output plays an important role in language learning because after the learner has listened to a teacher or in groups listened to peers discuss an item in his/her target language he/she must be given time to produce new structure of the target language based on the application and practice of what he has heard. This idea augurs well with the classroom situation in Kenya where English is used to give output.

This theory further states that for learning of a second language to occur, negotiating meaning needs to go beyond the usual sense of simply 'getting ones' message across. Simply getting one's message across does occur with grammatically deviant forms and sociolinguistically inappropriate language. Negotiating meaning needs to incorporate the notion of being pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not only conveyed, but appropriately (Swain, 1985, p. 248-9).

Mackey (2003) affirms that interaction episode involves learners being pushed towards the delivery of a message that is not merely conveyed, but appropriately conveyed, pushing the learners to make modifications in their output. Some of the interactions involve students and their teachers in the classroom and laboratories. Mackey (2002) also agrees that a teacher's feedback is a form of push that is necessary for language learning. Pornpibul (2002) also concludes that output is the product of learning rather than the process.

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Shehadeh (2002, p. 641) focused on occurrence rather than acquisition in output hypothesis. Shehadeh further shows that learners often respond to negotiation moves such as requests for clarification with modified output (Pica *et al.*, 1989). Swain identifies the following three functions of output:

1. The noticing/triggering function
2. The hypothesis testing function
3. The metalinguistic (reflective) function

### 1.2. The Noticing Function

Swain states that while learners try to produce the target language (vocally or silently), they do not know how to say (or write) precisely the meaning they wish to convey. As a result, they may recognize consciously some of their linguistic problems: it may bring their attention to something they need to discover about their second language (possibly directing their attention to relevant input). This awareness triggers cognitive processes that have been implicated in second language learning – ones in which learners generate linguistic knowledge which is new for them, or which consolidate their current existing knowledge (Swain & Lapkin, 1995).

Learners may simply notice a form in the target language due to the frequency or salience of the feature (Hass, 1997). They may also notice that the target language form is different from their own usage (noticing the gap). Learners may also notice that they cannot say what they want to say in the target language (Swain, 1995). Noticing this “hole” (Doughty & Williams, 1998) may be an important step to noticing the gap. In a research on whether or not output promotes noticing and learning of English among adult ESL learners, Izumi (2002, p. 570) concludes that greater learning evidenced by the learners under the “output” conditions trigger deeper and more elaborate processing of the form, which lead them to establish a more durable memory trace. This means that learners acquire the language when they are asked to write about the topic they have read about or discussed with their peers in class.

### 1.3. The Hypothesis Testing Function

The claim here is that output may sometimes be, from the learner’s perspective, “a trial run” reflecting their hypothesis of how to say (or write) their intent. It is further argued that changes in output resulting from feedback occur because learners are testing hypothesis. Research also shows that learners are more likely to modify their output, and do so more successfully, when they were pushed to do so.

### 1.4. Meta Linguistic (Reflective Function of Output)

In this function, the language used to reflect a language produced by others or the self, mediates second language. This idea was very much influenced by Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory of the mind, which states that people operate with mediating tools (Wertsch, 1985). An example of these tools is speaking. In this context, Swain (2000, 2002, 2006) re-labels “output” as speaking, writing, collaborative dialogue, private speech, verbalizing and/or languaging.

Dialogue among students is an example of learners operating on linguistic data which later become the learners’ mental activity. In dialogue with others, learning takes place (Donato & Lantolf, 1990; Lantolf, 2000a; Swain, 2001). These claims provide a basis for having students work together – eventually students are expected to engage in solo mental functioning, and that solo mental functioning has its source in joint activities. It is after such joint activities that learners are asked to write on a variety of writing skills.

Swain’s output hypothesis is important for this paper because it explains the processes the learner goes through before he/she produces the comprehensible out. This comprehensible output also helps the researcher explain the comprehensible output in integrated writing skills. However, Swain’s output hypothesis has been criticized by Rose Schaut (2007). Schaut (2007) argues that output hypothesis asks already struggling students to do too many things at the same time – listen, comprehend and respond. She argues further that the comprehensible output hypothesis is limited in its success because of the ‘discomfort’ factor. The critiques argue that if students are “pushed” they will be uncomfortable and this will cause anxiety that will inhibit learning.

Nevertheless, the hypothesis is useful in the teaching and learning of integrated writing skills because the word “push” as used by Swain does not mean coercion, it only means feedback or even motivation. Feedback is necessary in learning writing skills. Learners need feedback to test the language hypothesis they have formulated and then correct the structures of the language (Long & Porter, 1985). Naturally, human beings have the ability to learn a language. Just as human beings are born structured to walk so is the human brain structured to acquire a language (Chomsky, 1985). Therefore, the learner is not struggling as Schaut concludes, but he/she is putting the structures for language acquisitions to practice the way a baby struggles to crawl, stand and finally walk or even run.

### 1.5. The Teaching of English Language

Carr and Kemmis (1938, p. 12) argue that one indication of the degree of professionalism of a field is the extent to which the methods and procedures employed by members of the profession are based on a body of theoretical knowledge and research. In second language teaching, teacher education programmes typically include a knowledge base drawn from linguistics and language learning theory and a practical component based on language teaching methodology, and opportunity for practice teaching. In principle, knowledge and information from such disciplines as linguistics and second language acquisition provide the theoretical basis for practical components of language teachers. It is necessary to have a theory of effective language teaching, a statement of the general language teaching principles, that of the key variables in effective language teaching and how they are interrelated. Such a theory should form the basis for the principles and extent of second language teaching and learning.

Barasa (2002) says that in language education, the primary purpose is to explore the pedagogy of English. It focuses on what promotes and impedes the teaching of the English language. He also states that any attempt to discuss language pedagogy makes an inclusive assumption that language can therefore be learned. Sifuna (1990, p. 3) states that in order to develop learners’ speaking and writing abilities, there is need for language education. Bloom and Lahey (1978) [4] define language as “Knowledge of a code representing ideas about the world through convention system of arbitrary signals for communication” (p. 23). In this definition, language is seen as having three main dimensions. These are: content, form and language use. Consequently, people must have knowledge of a language, know how to put this knowledge into patterns that make sense to others, and have a reason to speak. This is the competence that people either acquire and/or learn.

Research on English as a second language was at first tied to English language teaching (ELT) under the age of the British Council which, around 1980s, set up a school of Applied

Linguistics at the University of Edinburgh (Howatt, 1988). Later, the Centre for applied Linguistics spread to other parts of Britain, the United States of America and other areas where English was spoken. One of the aspects of language investigated is the linguistic competence. The longitudinal study by Laban (1976) on first language acquisition demonstrates that competence in the spoken language precedes and is necessary before competence in writing. Some of the approaches and methodologies used in teaching foreign/second language include: structuralist approach, task based approach, humanistic approach, integrated approach and communicative approach. The proliferation of approaches and methods is a prominent characteristic of contemporary second language and foreign language teaching. To some, this reflects the strength of their profession. Invention of new classroom practices and approaches to designing language programmes and materials reflect a commitment to finding more efficient and more effective ways of teaching languages. When linguists and language specialists sought to improve the quality of language teaching in the late nineteenth century, they often did so by referring to the general principles and theories concerning how languages are learned, organized in memory, or how language itself is structured. This paper discusses the communicative approach because integrated writing skills take a communicative approach of language teaching.

### 1.6. Teaching of Writing: Principles

Writing is a process that requires careful planning and an appropriate approach or technique for the learner to acquire this skill. It is learned through a process of instruction that requires the learner to grasp the written form of language (Byrne, 1988)<sup>[6]</sup>. Writing is also regarded as the acquisition of basic skills that form the springboard for other skills that help one learn (Muliward, 1983, p. 68)<sup>[10]</sup>. Sure (1982, p. 13) holds the view that writing is a technical skill that cannot be acquired by chance or innate ability but rather needs instruction methods, teaching strategies and materials that only a trained teacher can handle.

Sure (1982) and Barley (1988) both agree that the teaching of writing skills requires a careful selection of teaching methods, materials and tasks. It is, therefore, up to language teachers to look for the best method influenced by a particular theory to teach effectively writing skills. This is so because language writing instruction is well established and it follows a particular theory (Asher & Simpson, 1994)<sup>[2]</sup>. Perhaps it is from this view that there are different approaches to teaching writing.

### 1.7. The Integrated Writing Skills

Strategies of integrated writing skills were developed by Cecilia (2007). Cecilia (2007) developed a technique in the advanced writing class that has proven successful in teaching the skills of summarizing, outlining and expressing opinion, through the medium of writing. She observes that in integrating writing lessons with reading, speaking and of course listening students are able to produce dynamic writing output. She vests her technique in the Developmental Language Acquisition theory which states that ESL learners go through different stages of development towards the target language. More specifically, Cecilia says that students learn different grammatical structures at different levels of development in each of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. At each stage, some grammatical

structures build on other structures and cannot be acquired before the other structure (Cecilia, 2007).

Incidentally, she states that students are first given comprehensible input through the integration of language skills of listening, speaking and reading. This is done before the writing itself occurs. Krashen (1985)<sup>[8]</sup> argues that the learner improves and progresses along a natural order if he/she receives L2 comprehensible input that is one step above or beyond his/her correct stage of linguistic competence.

With specific reference to writing, Cecilia (2007) used this technique with Japanese students who had been drawn from different language levels: thus those who had some exposure to English and not. She observes that based on the developmental Language Acquisition Theory mentioned above, learners at this stage, with influences from L1 writing, are now said to be able to write in paragraph forms, with a paragraph being defined as a coherent presentation of a number of utterances tied together by an overall message of intent.

A paragraph is distinguished from a set of sentences by textual cohesion which refers to elements that refer forward and backward among across sentence boundaries that tie sentences together. She argues further that once the student can construct paragraphs correctly using discourse connectors, subordination and coordination; they can be allowed to write longer paragraphs (Cecilia, 2007). Cecilia (2007) has developed a lesson plan for teaching writing integrated with other skills which allow students freedom to express themselves meaningfully.

She, therefore, observes that the most common problem that confronts teachers of a writing class does not tie so much on what to ask students to write about, the difficulty is more on how to motivate the students to write interesting and effective material. Writing for writing sake is a drag, and produces boring output. Cecilia implies that writing should be purposeful. The teacher and the learners should direct the outcome of this writing. The outcome should be an effective piece of writing that helps the learner acquire certain language skills like summarizing, outlining, expressing opinion, editing, reviewing among others writing skills. To achieve this objective, Cecilia (2007) develops the lesson plan as described below.

### 1.8. The Assignment Phase

The first phase of the lesson begins one week before with giving of the assignment. The teacher reads or writes on the board, or makes copies of a list of topics which he/she thinks to be of interest to the group. The teacher then allows the students to choose any one topic that they are most interested in and say what they would like to know about the topic. The teacher then tells the learners to look for a short (the shortest in one paragraph, the longest in one page) magazine or newspaper article, read it thoroughly until they understand the content, and make a copy to bring to class. If possible, they can borrow such a text from the library. No writing is done yet; students are required to only completely comprehend the text they have chosen.

### 1.9. The Interactive Phase

The second phase of the lesson is the interactive phase which begins on the day of the next class. Students who have chosen the same topic are called to sit together and form a group. The learners are then told to take turns in reading or reporting on each of their articles to their group members, while everybody

else listens and then asks questions to clarify points that are unclear, or simply make comments. At this point, they should allow as much time as the students are willing to talk, or half of the whole class-time. At this stage, the teacher also ensures that students within the same group recognize common or diverse aspects relating to the same topic. For instance, on the topic of environmental problems, they could have chosen articles on: Deforestation, Garbage Problems, Noise Pollution, among others.

### 1.10. The Writing Phase

The third phase of the lesson is the writing stage. The teacher asks the students to get back to their seats and write about two things: (i) The topic they had chosen to read and bring to class, and (2) the other related aspects of the same topic that they found out from the group interaction. This should result in good and endless writing by the student. The length of the writing material required will depend on the skills to be tested, the purpose of the lesson, and on the readiness of the class. The shortest can be a one-paragraphing writing of either a summary or reaction to the articles they chose. At the end of the lesson, the students are required to hand in their finished material. For a lesson on teaching skills of summarizing, the teacher asks the students to find 3-5 sentences indicating the main points in the article or as many as they can find, and re-write the main ideas in their own words.

At the same time they are told to include a sentence supporting each of these main ideas. For a lesson on expressing personal opinions/beliefs, students are told to identify, again, 2-3 main ideas (or as many as they think there are) and give their personal reactions to each of those items. At the end of these writing processes, the teacher asks the learners to do a summative writing which tests the application of some or all these skills in a set of paragraphs forming a coherent set of ideas to form an essay or a full composition. The final product would be an essay, for example, which consists of the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph as a summary, the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph as the outline (with main ideas and supporting ideas indicated), and the third paragraph containing their personal reaction to the article and so on.

Teaching the set of skills of summarizing, outlining and reacting to a posted article using writing as a medium helps students organize ideas while allowing them to express these ideas in complete sentences. The students are trained to put ideas logically and organize thought patterns and make writing more interesting for both themselves and the teacher. This technique allows the learners to write freely, and gives them a feeling that they have an investment on the topic to be able to produce really dynamic writing. This is an essential way of teaching integrated writing skills. From this technique, the learner is exposed to adequate input through listening, reading and speaking before he/she writes. One would argue that this input is fully integrated giving the learner a rich experience before moving to the next step to write. L0 (1992, p. 34) states that integration of skills backed up by meaningful experience is essential to the second language learner. The integrative method allows the learners more chance to hear and speak the target language – hence the learner writes more effectively.

The wide experience that the learner gets through reading, listening and speaking before actual writing boosts the learner's motivation and confidence to write. Csizer (1998) observes that successful second language acquisition depends on whether or not teachers can stimulate students' intrinsic motivation. Brown (2001) makes the same observation.

Another technique was developed by Sofija Micic (2007) <sup>[11]</sup> which she called the integrated skills model. She used this model to teach English writing to medical university students in Belgrade. She says that the new approach is context-based, in which learning is contextual, holistic and synthetic rather than analytic. It is student- rather than subject-centred, enquiry-based and interactive, involving cooperative learning. Good learning is that which involves the students fully. Barasa (2005) <sup>[3]</sup> says that the goal of any English teacher is to provide the best opportunity for his/her learners to improve their ability to speak and write the language. In this integrated skills model, one significant part of instruction is devoted to writing. Others include listening, reading and speaking skills that encourage a wide range of activities: listening and note-taking, reading skills (such as skimming, scanning, guessing meanings from the context and using the dictionary) class discussions, oral presentations among others. In this model the aim is to develop the learners' study skills competence instead of teaching the specific individual skills. This model adapts two approaches to teach integrated writing skills, these are the product approach and the process approach.

The product approach to writing means setting up a context (exploring the situations that require a particular register, genre, audience, purpose, topic), modelling (by reading texts of the appropriate genre), noticing (setting tasks that draw students' attention to typical features and grammatical features), explicit genre analysis, when students, prompted by the teacher, work out the major features of the text; the function, styles, schematic stages and linguistic features of the genre), and text comparison. This can be followed by controlled production of drafts, e.g. text completion, text reconstruction and text re-ordering, and finally independent production of drafts, when students individually or in groups choose a topic within the target genre, do the vocabulary research and write the text.

The process approach, on the other hand, consists of the thinking stage in which students identify the rhetorical problem, plan a solution or series of solutions to the problem and finally reach an appropriate conclusion; and the process stage involving translating the plan into paragraphs and sentences, reviewing the first draft and then revising the text to produce a number of subsequent drafts. In the actual teaching, the skills of editing and review are taught through peer review and group work. Both approaches are good and can be used effectively through the following stages:

1. Develop rhetorical awareness by looking at model texts
2. Practice specific genre features, especially moves and writer stance.
3. Carry out writing tasks showing awareness of the needs of individual readers and the discourse community and the purpose of writing.
4. Evaluate the writing (through peer review or reformulation)

In this model, emphasis is laid on the teachers' ability to seek a balance between talking about writing and setting talks where learners actually write, singly or in pairs or groups, while in class. It is worth noting that the integrated writing skills approach to writing provides input for other language work, i.e. reading, speaking, and most importantly, integrated skills tasks.

### 1.11. Statement of the Problem

The performance of candidates in English in terminal exams has never been satisfactory. This concern has also been raised by Kissock (1982) who says that schools have not been

developing citizens who are fluent enough in spoken and written discourse. Eshiwani (1993), in an address of first-year students at Kenyatta University, stated that university graduates are unable to express themselves in English (*Daily Nation* 1993, May 7). The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) reports from 1990-2008 also show the poor performance in the subject at KCSE level. Although great emphasis has been put on writing skills, little has been achieved. Teachers have not given this language skill its rightful approach. Writing is not just about putting ideas on paper but a skill that requires careful planning, practice then writing.

Waititu (1995) [13] opines that only a small number of students in secondary schools are able to write a letter of application without errors. Brumfit (1994) [5] says that students in developing countries remain deficient in the ability to use the language in communication whether written or spoken. This is so because majority of teachers of English do not use skills and strategies necessary for effective communication in the written mode of communication. Brumfit (1994) [5] further argues that a great deal of writing that occurs in second language classrooms is not primarily concerned so much with developing writing skills as with teaching of particular structures. The learner is looked at as a manipulator of previously learned language structures, the piece of writing as a display of language proficiency while the teacher is seen as an editor or proof reader not especially interested in the quality of ideas and expressions but primarily concerned with formal linguistic structures (Magut, 2003) [9].

Graves (1983, p. 114) [7] argues that while such an approach to teaching writing may have a general teaching purpose, it is distinct in intention from work that aims at teaching students to write effectively in English.

It is against this background that the study set out to investigate the challenges both teachers and learners faced in using integrated writing skills approach to teach and learn writing skills. The research looked at the integrated writing skills approach as one that could help improve writing among English as a second language learning in Kenya. The problem, therefore, rests in the approaches that teachers of English use to teach writing skills, which eventually lead to poor performance in English. The research, therefore, sought to investigate the challenges which teachers and learners faced in utilizing the integrated writing skills approach.

**2. Materials and Methods**

The study was carried out in selected secondary schools in Bungoma North District of Western Province, Kenya. The district had a total of 50 secondary schools at the time of study. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The District had a high student population with 5 provincial secondary schools of which 4 were boys’ schools and 1 was a girls’ school. The District also had more mixed day schools than single-sex schools. Many students in the District drop out of school to engage in farming. The District was chosen because, having taught in the District for four years, the author was very much aware of the poor KCSE results in English.

The study population from which the sample was drawn consisted of 50 public secondary schools. From these, 5 were boys’ schools, 8 were girls’ school and 37 were mixed schools. Twenty (20) schools were selected from the sample population. The teachers were selected through purposive sampling from sampled schools. The study also used simple random sampling to select Form Three students to participate

in the study but proportional sampling was used to arrive at a particular number of Form Three students per school to be studied because these schools had different student population particularly in Form Three. The Form Three class was chosen because it is at this class level that many teachers put in their best strategies to teach writing and the students at this level have some competence that could enable them answer the questionnaire well. The Form Four students being candidates could not be involved since they were busy preparing for KCSE examinations.

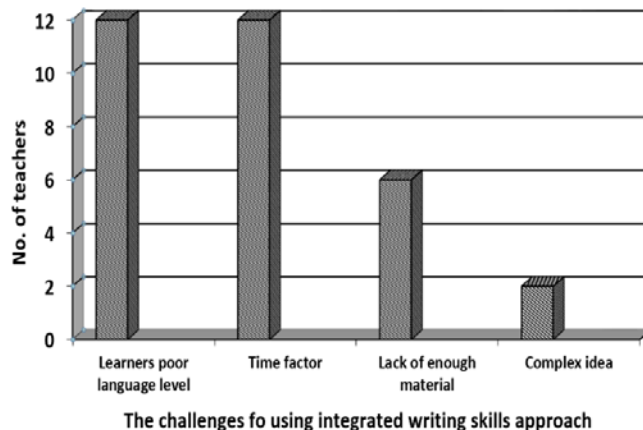
Data was collected using a questionnaire with both closed- and open-ended items, an interview schedule and observation schedule. The collected data was then analyzed by use of the SPSS program to compute measures of central tendency such as mean, median and mode.

**3. Results**

**3.1. Teachers’ Responses**

In the questionnaire, the study asked teachers to state how they approached integrated writing skills. Fourteen (70%) teachers gave learners a text to read and then asked them to write a summary or outline; 4 teachers said they explained to the learners what summary or outline is then asked them to read the text before they asked the learners to write the summary or outline; 2(10%) teachers asked their learners to read the text, discuss in groups then they gave a brief explanation on the text before they asked their learners to write the summary or outline.

This means that the teachers do not give the integrated writing skills a holistic approach, as it should be, when teaching writing. This in turn affects the learners because they do not get adequate exposure to a skill before they are asked to write, hence their failure to write competently. For example, 2(10%) teachers who embraced holistic integrated writing skills rated their students’ written work high; 4(20%) teachers who partially embraced the integrated writing skills rated their students’ written work average while 14(70%) teachers who never used integrated writing skills rated their students’ written work below average. Data also revealed that teachers were aware of the integrated writing skills in teaching writing but they never embraced it fully as it should be. Many teachers feared that their learners’ language level was so low that if they fully embraced the approach the learners would not get the ideas right. They also argued that the approach required more time than normal lesson time. The responses obtained from the teachers’ interview were as shown in Figure 1 below.



**Fig 1:** Challenges of using integrated writing skills approach to teach and learn writing

The findings show that although teachers knew about the integrated writing skills approach, the many challenges they faced made them avoid the approach, or to simply use it partially. The 12(60%) teachers argued that they did not use the integrated writing skills approach because their learners' language level was very low and that they feared if they used this approach many learners would be confused or would not write well.

Low language level is attributed to the fact that English is taught and learnt as a second language (L2) in Kenya and, therefore, many learners only strive to use it while in class but they would use Kiswahili and other African languages outside the classroom. The same number, 12(60%), of teachers also argued that integration in itself requires a lot of time and that they would spend a lot of time teaching writing at the expense of other language skills like reading, listening and speaking. Six (30%) teachers said they lacked enough text books and other reading materials that would necessitate integration. They argued that many students shared set books, so that the textbook to student ratio was 1:3 or even higher. Therefore, teaching writing through the integration writing skills approach was difficult. Two (10%) teachers argued that their learners could not write by this approach because it is so complex. They argued that students got confused and missed out the main ideas.

Asked to state how they taught writing skills like summary, outlines edits, reviews and expressing opinion using set books, all the 20(100%) teachers said they first allowed students to read the text they wanted before asking them to write the skill they wanted. On summary writing, all the 20(100%) teachers said that they allowed learners to read before they asked them to write a summary on the idea they wanted.

This meant that teachers never fully embraced the integrated writing skills approach. They left out other stages like after reading the text, the learners should form groups and discuss the text, and then the learners choose one of them to present to the group what they have discussed. After this, the learners should find handouts with information on the same text and read. This should then be followed by the teacher giving a brief explanation on the text and asking the learners to write. Such holistic integration is necessary for good writing because it gives learners a rich input required for good writing. By so doing, the learners can integrate all the four language skills starting from reading, speaking, listening that will finally lead to writing.

On outlines, 20(100%) teachers said they allowed learners to read the text first; the teachers then gave a brief explanation of what outlines were after the students had read, then asked the learners to write the outline. This meant that the learners did not get enough input to write outlines because they never fully embraced the integrated writing skills approach. Normally, the teacher should allow students to read the text, then allow them to form groups and discuss the text, then look for other written material or oral material on the text and read or listen. Then they should report to the groups what they have found on the same text before the teacher gives a brief explanation and allows the students to write the outline.

The study found that review and expression of opinions were taught in the same way by many teachers. This practice denies the learners the crucial input before they are asked to write. This input is inherent in the integrated writing skills approach.

### 3.2. Students' Responses

On the challenges of learning writing through integrated writing skills, 190(95%) students admitted that they got

confused and even failed to get the concept while ten students remained non-committal. This confusion and failure to understand the skills required when writing is attributed to the fact that many teachers, as revealed in the teachers' questionnaire, did not prepare the learners well through integrated writing skills before they asked them to write. Therefore, learners were denied the opportunity to get enough input before they were asked to write.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Teachers' Challenges in using the Integrated Writing Skills Approach to Teach Writing

All of the teachers knew about the integrated writing skills approach but they said the approach had many challenges. Perhaps it is because of these challenges that only few of them embraced the approach in teaching writing.

All of the teachers said that the approach could not be used appropriately because their learners' language level was very low. They argued that the learners would not get the main ideas if they were told to write many skills in a single piece. This meant that teachers preferred to teach writing using other approaches like the traditional approach, which has its origin in the Audi-lingual method of language teaching. This traditional approach puts emphasis on the form of structures produced so that elements like: correct grammar, correct spelling and correct image played a central role in language learning (Applebee, 1988, p. 72) <sup>[1]</sup>. In this approach (traditional), emphasis is also put on the topic sentence and the discourse markers and the final whole of the paragraph (Graves, 1983, p. 216). Many teachers said their learners would not be able to write many skills in a single essay without getting confused if the integrated approach was used. Indeed, most of the teachers said their learners would reproduce or lift the text as it is, even when they were asked to make a summary or an outline of the text.

Another challenge was that many teachers faced difficulties in preparing the learners using the integrated writing skills approach. This could imply that the teachers failed to utilize the approach as it should be. The integrated writing skills approach requires that before writing itself, the teacher reads or writes on the board, or makes copies of a list of as many topics, which he/she thinks to be of interest to the group. He/she then allows the students to choose any one of the topics and something they would like to know about the topic, then the teacher asks the learners to look for short articles or other written materials to read thoroughly until they understand the content. In the next step, the learners form groups according to the topics they have chosen after which they take turns reporting or reading what they have found out on the topic as others listen and ask questions for clarity or make comments. The teacher at this point allows learners time to discuss and exhaust their talk.

The last stage is where the teacher allows them to write. The teacher asks the students to get back to their seats and write. For example, for a lesson on teaching skills on summarizing, the teacher asks the students to find 3-5 sentences indicating the main points in the text or as many as they can find, then re-write the main ideas in their own words. At the same time, they are told to include a sentence supporting each of these main ideas. For a lesson on expressing personal opinions/beliefs, students are told to identify, again, 2-3 main ideas (or as many as they think there are) and give their personal opinion on each of those items. At the end these writing processes, the teacher asks the learners to do a summative writing which tests the application of some or all of these skills in a set of paragraphs forming a coherent set of

ideas to form a piece of work. The final product would, therefore, be a written work with for example, 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph as a summary, the 2<sup>nd</sup> paragraph as the outline, and the third paragraph as containing their personal opinion to the article and so on.

The integrated writing skills approach is therefore learner-centred rather than teacher students. However, as the research has shown, many teachers do not allow students to go through this process. Many teachers only allow students to read the given text and then ask them to write a summary or outline. The teachers, therefore, have failed to give the learners the comprehensible input that is required before they ask them to write. Learners are, therefore, denied the necessary output required before writing, subsequently failing to write or writing shoddy pieces. Teaching the set of skills of summarizing, outlining and reacting to a given text using writing as a medium helps students organize ideas while allowing them to express these ideas in complete sentences. The students are trained to arrange ideas logically and organize thought patterns and make writing more interesting for both themselves and the teachers. This technique allows the learners to write freely, and gives them a feeling that they have an investment on the topic to be able to produce really dynamic writing (Cecilia, 2007). However, as revealed in the study, the teachers felt this approach would not augur well with their learners because their learners' language level was very low.

Another challenge was the time factor. The teachers said the approach required a lot of time and they feared that they would teach writing at the expense of other language skills. The other challenge was also the lack of enough teaching and learning material. A good number of teachers said they lacked enough textbooks for learners to complement their available texts for reading. They said their schools had small libraries that were not equipped or had only similar texts, i.e. texts prescribed for KCSE exams. Even though the teachers said many of their learners shared textbooks to the ratio of 1:3 or even higher, what really hampered reading or demanded a lot of time was the fact that learners would read the same text in shifts if they were to understand it better. Moreover, some teachers said the integrated writing approach is complex and many learners failed to utilize it properly. They feared that their learners would not get the ideas if teachers used this approach to teach writing.

#### 4.2. Challenges Learners faced in using the Integrated Writing Skills Approach to Learn Writing

Learners also experienced challenges by learning writing through the integrated writing skills approach. Of the students who participated in the study, 150(75%) said they would not understand the skills if their teachers integrated many skills to write. The same number said they would get confused or mix up the ideas if they were asked to write many skills at ago. This can be attributed to the fact that English is a second language in Kenya and many learners use it only in the classroom but use other African languages outside the classroom. This is also attributable to the fact that teachers never approach the integrated writing skills as it should be, as already seen from their responses.

This concurs with what Sure (1982) and Barley (1988) argue, that teaching of writing skills requires a careful selection of teaching methods, materials and tasks. Byrne (1988)<sup>[6]</sup> also argues that writing is a process that requires careful planning and an appropriate approach or technique for the learner to acquire this skill. Indeed, the study established that the

teachers lacked this careful planning. As a result, the learners found it difficult to write good pieces. They could not write many skills at ago. Learners also faced the challenge of mixing up the skills and could even write skills not required or could only write a single skill, instead of number of skills.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The main challenges that teachers face in using the integrated writing skills approach are: they find the approach time consuming, their learners' language level is low hence learners will most likely miss out the main concept, lack of enough text books for the approach and the approach is a bit too complicated for the students. These challenges continue to inhibit the use of the integrated writing skills approach in teaching writing.

As a result, language learning is also inhibited. There is need, therefore, to come up with workshops and in-service training to equip teachers with the necessary skills, confidence and motivation to effectively use this approach to teach writing skills. In addition, teachers should carefully plan to teach writing so that they make use of the best approach. Teaching and learning of writing should also be given more attention in school; it should be allocated more time per week than it is currently to give teachers enough time to prepare the best approach.

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