NAMIBIAN LEARNERS’ AND TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS REGARDING ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING ACTIVITIES: THE CASE OF SELECTED SCHOOLS IN WINDHOEK

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Abstract

This study investigated the Namibian learners and teachers’ perceptions regarding the English Second Language (ESL) writing activities in selected schools of the Windhoek. It aimed at addressing seven major questions that were pertinent in understanding the significance of ESL writing activities in the lives of the participants. These questions looked at the perceptions of ESL learners and teachers regarding the level of enjoyment and usefulness of ESL writing activities, competence levels in the writing activities, levels of support in learning and teaching of the writing activities and the differences in the learners’ perceptions of ESL writing activities based on gender and the performance level of schools.

Purposefully, one higher performing, one average performing and one lower performing school from the Windhoek were selected. The three schools were chosen on the basis of how learners performed in ESL writing in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 examinations. A total of 300 Grade 11 learners were selected in each school using random sampling of full class groups. One focus group discussion with Grade 11 learners from each of the sampled school was also carried out where 10 learners were randomly selected to participate. Questionnaires for learners and teachers were used after a pilot study was carried out.

The following is a synthesis of the findings: more learners felt writing activities were easy compared to those who saw them as difficult. The research revealed differences in how learners enjoyed and upheld the usefulness of ESL writing activities. Chi-square results on the analysis of the perceptions of learners regarding writing activities, in relation to gender, demonstrated that in most cases, the differences were not statistically significant. Several chi-square analyses done on the schools’ performance levels in relation to ESL writing activities yielded clear and statistically significant differences between the three schools.
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DECLARATION

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the introduction and the orientation to the study. It furthermore gives the statement of the problem which briefly shows how low the performance of Namibian learners were in English Second Language (ESL), based on the examination results of 2008, 2009 and 2010 for grade 12. The research questions to be investigated are also outlined as well as the significance of this study and its limitations. Lastly definitions of key terms are given.

1.2 ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

Before Namibia’s independence, the Cape Education Curriculum was used in Namibian schools. The medium of instruction in schools was Afrikaans, which was also the official language. Several changes were put into place after Namibia’s independence. For example, the Higher International General Certificate of Secondary Education (H/IGCSE) as based on the Cambridge education curriculum replaced the Cape Education Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2010b). This change of curriculum included the use of English as the medium of instruction. This H/IGCSE curriculum aimed at enabling learners to acquire reasonable competence in English and to be prepared for English medium instruction throughout the secondary cycle. It also aimed at promoting the language and cultural identities of learners through the use of their home languages as media of instruction, at least in Grades 1-3, and the teaching of home language throughout formal education. The Ministry of Education replaced the H/IGCSE curriculum with its own Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate (NSSC) curriculum in 2007. This curriculum is
recognized and accepted by tertiary institutions both nationally and internationally (Ministry of Education, 2010b).

The Namibia Senior Secondary Syllabus for Ordinary level (NSSCO) is discussed in this study. This syllabus was chosen because the research used only the ordinary level examination results of 2008, 2009, and 2010. These results were used as the latest available results prior to the study. The Namibia Senior Secondary syllabus for English as a Second Language is mainly based on reproductive and receptive skills. The reproductive skills involve reading and writing activities while the receptive skills involve listening and speaking activities (Ministry of Education, 2010b). This syllabus allows 100 marks for both reproductive and receptive skills. For reproductive skills, the syllabus allows 60 marks for the Core level Paper 1 which is Reading and Directed Writing. It also allows 30 marks for Paper 3 which is Listening Comprehension and 10 marks for the oral or speaking which are the receptive skills. The syllabus also allows a reduced 90 marks to 60 marks for the Extended Paper 2, Reading and Directed Writing, 30 marks for listening comprehension and 10 marks for oral and speaking. A number of writing activities are required by the Namibia Senior Secondary Syllabus to be covered in the ESL classrooms. These activities include: writing essays or compositions, writing book or film reviews, writing reports, articles, letters, diaries and grammar activities. The Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate syllabus for ordinary level states that although literature is not formally assessed in that curriculum, it forms part of the reading programme. For this reason, learners and teachers have to include poetry, prose and drama in their choice of texts (Ministry of Education, 2010b). This study examines the Grade 11 learners and teachers’ attitudes and perceived competencies of English writing activities because it is through these activities that learners develop their English proficiency. Grade 12 end of year examination results of 2008, 2009 and 2010 were used
because grade 11 learners also use the same syllabus but write similar internal examinations in the school as in grade 12.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Over the years examination result statistics have shown that the ESL performance of Namibian learners on both higher and ordinary level has been very low. The following ordinary level results were obtained in the mentioned years; in 2008 only 13.6% of candidates who wrote the grade 12 National Examination received A to C symbols which is the entry requirement for university studies. The rest scored D and lower. In 2009 only 16% of learners achieved A to C symbols while 84% achieved D and lower. The results for 2010 showed that only 36.8% of learners achieved A to C symbols while 62.2% achieved D and lower. These results were used as the available results prior to the study. When one looks at the results in the three years above, it is clear that there was a slight increase in 2009 and another increase in 2010. Nevertheless the number of learners scoring A to C remains low (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2009b; 2010a).

As indicated earlier, the Namibia Senior Secondary Syllabus for ESL is based mainly on speaking, writing, listening and reading activities. This study focuses on the reproductive skills of the syllabus, namely on the writing activities, since it is through the use of these activities that learners express themselves in all examinations. There seemed to be a problem of low performance in English writing in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 National examinations as indicated by the examination results in these years (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2009; 2010). This low performance may be attributed to several factors. Part of the reason for this low achievement in English writing might be attributed to learners and teachers’ perceptions of English writing
activities, as expected from them in the Namibian curriculum. It was thus decided to investigate these perceptions in this research study.

In recent years, studies related to writing attitudes were carried out. For instance, a study by Nofaine (2010) investigated the attitudes of teachers and learners to using Arabic in English Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Saudi Public Schools. The results revealed that the attitudes of the teachers and the learners to writing in Arabic were generally positive. Another study by Mc Cartney (2005) on English language learners’ writing practices and attitudes, which involved an investigation of six Mandarin-speaking and five Spanish speaking elementary students, was carried out. The results revealed that students engaged in a variety of writing practices at home and at school where it was also indicated that their attitudes varied from positive to negative towards writing in English and their native languages. However, to the researcher’s knowledge no research was done in Namibia on the perceptions of learners and teachers with regard to ESL writing activities.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Due to the poor performance in ESL writing activities as mentioned above, this study investigated the perceptions of Grade 11 learners with regard to the English Second Language (ESL) writing activities they did in class. It also looked into the perceptions of teachers regarding the teaching of ESL writing activities. The specific research questions were:

1. How enjoyable and useful do learners perceive ESL writing activities to be?

2. What are the learners’ perceived competencies regarding their ESL writing skills?

3. How do learners perceive the support they get from their ESL teachers in ESL writing activities?
4. How enjoyable and important do teachers perceive the teaching of ESL writing activities?

5. What are teachers’ perceived competencies with regard to the teaching of English Second Language writing skills?

6. How do teachers perceive the support they get in their teaching of ESL writing?

7. Are there any differences in the learner’s perceptions on ESL writing activities due to gender and the performance level of schools?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisaged that this study will assist various stakeholders such as the civil society, government, teachers and parents in finding solutions to the improvement of performance in English writing. The recommendations might underscore the development of more target specific methods of teaching ESL, in order to improve learners writing skills in Namibian schools. Once teachers are aware of their learners’ perceptions and attitudes to English writing activities, they may plan and implement alternatives to the teaching and learning activities in their classes. The findings could form a basis for further research in the area of ESL writing.

1.6 LIMITATIONS

The study is limited to three secondary schools in Windhoek which means the results cannot be generalized to the whole country. The small number of teachers included for this study is a limitation, but all grade 11 and 12 ESL teachers in the three schools were used. Due to the possible lack of openness and social desirability of respondents, answers may not be completely true.
1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

For this study the following definitions apply: English medium of instruction refers to the use of English in the teaching of school subjects.

Mother tongue refers to the use of native or home language in teaching.

English writing activities refer to the activities as expected from the Namibia Senior Secondary syllabus for English as a Second language.

1.8 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined the writing activities required by the Namibia Senior Secondary Syllabus that need to be covered in the ESL classrooms. The statement of the problem indicated the low performance of learners in A to C symbols in 2008, 2009 and 2010 examinations. Research questions were clearly stated and some limitations to this study as well as the definitions of terms used in the study were also identified. The next chapter presents the literature review that covers aspects such as development of English as a Second Language, approaches to writing in a second language, and different forms of English Second Language writing.
CHAPTER TWO
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the theoretical framework of the study; the development of English Second Language (ESL) approaches to writing; ESL teaching approaches related to the Communicative Language Teaching Theory; different forms of ESL writing and composing; the teaching and learning of writing skills in the Namibian context; factors that play a role in writing competence and positive attitudes of learners regarding language writing activities; factors that play a role in creating interest and improving performance in writing activities; regional and national statistical analyses of the 2008, 2009 and 2010 Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate examination (NSSC), as well as a summary of the ideas discussed in this chapter.

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is the Communicative Language Teaching theory which is based on the work of sociolinguists, particularly that of Hymes (1972). The Communicative Approach in language teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. The goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as “communicative competence.” Hymes’s theory of communicative competence tries to explain what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. In Hymes’s view, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires both knowledge and the ability for language use. According to Hymes (1972), effective communication refers to the learners’ ability to transmit information, ideas, thoughts or feelings through speaking or writing and their ability to receive these through listening or reading.
It is assumed by Hymes that learners will have to prepare to use the target language orally and in written form by writing essays, letters and diaries. Learners should also use the language in any predictable and unpredictable act of communication that will arise both in classroom interaction and in real-world situations. Hymes proposes that knowing a language involves more than knowing a set of grammatical, lexical and phonological rules. In order to use the language effectively, Hymes states that learners need to develop communicative competence, namely the ability to use the language they are learning appropriately in a given social encounter. Both the ESL syllabus and ESL subject policy for Namibian schools advocate the communicative teaching of English.

Therefore, the Communicative Language Teaching theory states that second language competence is defined not by grammatical knowledge alone, but by communicative uses as well. It recognizes the importance of communication for the purposes of language needs of learners and the processes of language learning. In addition, the communicative language teaching theory works together with learner-centred teaching by focusing on what learners are going to write in order to become effective communicators (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

2.3 DEVELOPMENT OF ESL WRITING

Silva (1993) identifies three time periods in recent years in which ESL writing has developed. The three time periods, as identified by Silva, are the mid-sixties, the 1970’s and the mid-1980’s. The mid-sixties is the period where the focus on writing was very traditional and concentrated on form. According to Silva (1993), this means the way writing was taught did not regard learners as active individuals with views, opinions, experience and knowledge, but viewed them as empty vessels that come to school to get knowledge and information from the
Writing concentrated on form. It was believed that knowing a language involved knowing a set of grammatical, lexical and phonological rules. In this time period, content was supplied to the learner and the objective of writing was to reinforce or test the accurate application of grammatical rules. During this time period, the Audio-lingual method of writing was mostly used. The Audio-lingual method involves the use of sentence drills, filling-ins, substitutions, transformation and sentence completions.

The Audio-lingual method also stresses learning to speak in a language before engaging in writing. This means the method emphasises the use of speaking and listening skills to learning a language before reading and writing could take place. Silva (1993), furthermore, states that learning through this method took place through mimicry or memorization and learners learned dialogues from textbooks verbatim by heart. Learners would first listen to tape-recorded instruction by a first language speaker; then repeat after the voice in a chorus before they practised reciting the words on their own.

According to Rivers (1999), in the beginning stages of the use of the Audio-lingual method, writing is imitative, consisting of transcription of words and dialogue sentences from the book. Students are given the opportunity to write out variations of structural pattern drill items. Students are encouraged to express themselves more independently on certain topics by giving oral reports to the class and by writing these down in the form of short compositions.

The second time period in the development of ESL is the 1970’s. Here the focus was specifically on writing. According to Silva (1993), composing in ESL writing became influenced by research in English first language writing. It allowed learners’ compositions to be extended from mere sentence-combining activities to more controlled exercises. During this time period
the process approach to writing was introduced where learners were viewed as creators of meaning, and composing was now left to the learners’ creation or invention.

In the process approach to language teaching, learners completed journals, and attention was given to content before form (Rosenblatt, 1994). The process approach allowed writers to choose their own topics in writing sessions, then generate their own ideas, write drafts and obtain feedback from their colleagues and the teacher. Concentration on content or meaning, rather than on form, meant not focusing much on mechanics like grammar. Some proponents of the process approach, according to Krashen (1984), completely eliminated the teaching of grammar error correction while others left these activities to the end of the writing process.

For the process approach to take place effectively, Keh (1990) argued that it would need to be supported by classrooms that have environments and activities in which learners are motivated and encouraged to draw on their own resources to make “live-meanings”. This means that the activities the learners engaged in would have to be realistic and meaningful, just like the materials they used to construct meaning.

The last time period in the development of ESL writing is the 1980’s. Focus on written work was shifted to other disciplines. Language in this period was taught through content subjects. According to Silva (1993), language at this time was seen as an instrument of thinking processes while shape and structure were provided by content. A comprehensive “writing- across-the-curriculum” approach was used during this period. This is an approach to writing which asks students to work on their writing in all disciplines and at all grade levels, placing some responsibility for assigning and evaluating writing with every teacher. In this way, language instruction became the business of all teachers who used language. As a result, learners could not
view English teachers as the only ones concerned with good writing, but that all teachers were responsible for good writing (Young, 1986).

From the above, it can be deduced that the Process Approach and Writing-across-the-curriculum are much more relevant to the Communicative Language Teaching theory than other approaches. Focus on the writer and focus on the reader are examples of the requirements of the communicative language teaching theory that the Namibian ESL syllabus and ESL policy for Namibian schools advocate (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

2.4 ESL TEACHING APPROACHES RELATED TO THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING THEORY

Richards (1984) identifies three ESL teaching approaches that are related to the Communicative Language Teaching theory advocated by the Namibian ESL syllabus and the ESL policy for Namibian education. These three approaches are regarded by research as the newest approaches to language teaching.

The first approach, according to Richards (1984) is the Total Physical Response. This approach was designed by Asher (1977), who believes the idea behind this type of learning is that if students internalize listening comprehension of a second language first, they can make the transition to oral production, reading and writing with a fair amount of ease. The aim of this approach is for language learning experiences to reduce stress and anxieties in ESL classrooms.

The other appealing and more communicatively rooted ESL teaching approach is the Natural Approach. This is one of the most recent and widely used methods in communicative-based classrooms. The Natural Approach puts emphasis on the message to be communicated rather than on form. It puts emphasis on the use of real objects to aid classroom learning activities.
According to Richard-Amato (1995), writing activities under the Natural Approach include writing memos, filling out forms, writing personal letters, e.g., pen pal letters. These are some of the kinds of writing activities stressed by the Communicative Language Teaching theory.

The last approach is the Silent Way. This approach contends that the learning process in a given classroom should be learner-centred. In a learner-centred classroom, the teaching approach considers the learners’ views, opinions, experiences and the knowledge they gain from the community. Learners work in groups to accomplish tasks in order to learn from each other (Ministry of Education, 2009a). In the Silent Way Approach, the mind is seen as an active unit that constructs its own inner criteria for learning. Learners under this approach are expected to use their own cognitive structures to experience emotions and knowledge of the world in order to absorb knowledge from the environment.

According to Stevick (1980), teachers employing this Silent Way Approach would at all times be expected to allow learners to discover knowledge on their own, and not dictate instruction.

2.5 DIFFERENT FORMS OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE WRITING AND COMPOSITION

Since English is the global language, and writing is one of the necessary means to communicate precisely, writing skills are essential in order to participate competitively in global interactions and business in general. Grabe and Kaplan (2000) argue that it should be the responsibility of English language instructors in an educational institute to provide and emphasize a good and correct fundamental background of writing skills to students because command of good writing skills is a vital tool for anybody to succeed in his or her career. They also mention that students in the (ESL) context will need English writing skills, ranging from simple paragraph and
summary skills to the ability to write essays and professional articles. They further state that writing is a productive skill that needs various competencies such as linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse knowledge as well as knowledge of language use like grammar, structure and vocabulary. An organized, critical way of thinking; therefore, writing is not only a single activity but a series of interrelated activities. Since process is one of the key elements leading to a good piece of writing, various academics have identified and specified steps in the writing process based on the writing theories of Flower and Hayes (2001).

Different methods of ESL writing, their composition and function have been identified and discussed in existing literature. These are controlled writing, free or guided writing, language based writing, process approach, product approach, communicative approach and web-based language instruction. (Ministry of Education, 2009a; Raimes, 1983; Reid, 1993; Silva, 1993). Each of these is discussed in the next few paragraphs.

Controlled Writing is a form of writing that allows students to practise and habituate current structures, and thereby learn to write on their own. Committing errors in this form of writing is strictly prevented, and fluency is expected to grow out of practice with structures. According to Silva (1993), learners are expected to do exercises that consist of information that they could copy or change. This form of writing places emphasis on the manipulation of language structures and sentence patterns.

Free or Guided Writing is moving away from more controlled exercises to free exercises. Silva (1993) states that exercises in this form of writing are based on language, and they concentrate on vocabulary building, reading comprehension, grammar and oral skills that result in a piece of writing. This writing type, according to Silva, can be used for five to ten minutes as warm-up
activity at the beginning of a period. This practice can make students feel at ease, expressing their ideas without focusing on correct grammar. This makes learners concentrate first on content and then later on correct form. The Namibia Senior Secondary Certificate syllabus outlines the writing activities to be taught in the ESL classroom as follows: writing essays, reports, newspaper / magazine articles, book/film reviews, letters, diaries, grammar activities, summaries and poems. Even though poetry is not assessed formally the ordinary level syllabus requires teachers to include it with prose and drama in their teaching because it forms part of the reading programme.

Raimes (1983) discusses the Language-Based Writing form by stating that writing in this form is essential because it reinforces grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary. Furthermore, writing also calls for strategies and an organized, critical way of thinking; therefore, writing is not only a single activity but a series of interrelated activities. Since process is one of the key elements leading to a good piece of writing, various academics have identified and specified steps in the writing process based on the writing theories of Flower and Hayes (2001).

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Raimes (1983) discusses the Language-Based Writing form by stating that writing in this form is essential because it reinforces grammatical structures, idioms and vocabulary. In addition, she states that teaching writing is a unique way to reinforce learning from truth. Reid (1993) provides an example of a language-based writing style as that which would be based on the language component such as an assignment that focuses on verb tenses, the use of adjectives and particular sentence structure that lead learners to guided and free writing. Sentence-combining technique is another example of language-based writing.

The Product Approach to writing is based on the recognition of the needs of ESL learners in an academic setting. This form of writing (Silva, 1993) has been recognized as an important form of writing that would help learners, entering universities, to cope with academic writing. In a Product Approach, a model is provided and various exercises are undertaken to draw attention to
the Product Approach’s important features. Students are then required to produce similar texts close to the original text.

The focus on Communicative Writing according to the Ministry of Education (2009a) is on communication by emphasising the content rather than the form (therefore focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language). In this form of writing, language items are selected on the basis of what items the learners need to know. In teaching these items the emphasis is placed on content, meaning and interest of learners. The Ministry of Education further states that this form of writing aims to cover only what the learner needs and what he or she sees as important. In addition to the above, emphasis in this form of writing is put on the use of authentic, everyday language. Furthermore, it regards spoken interactions as equally important as reading and writing. The focus is thus on communicative functions. Finally, this form of writing is learner-centred and experienced-based where learners are allowed to mark each others’ work with the teacher’s support (Ministry of Education, 2009a).

Web-Based Language Instruction is a type of language instruction which makes use of the internet as an informational tool from which inquiry-oriented a drawn from the web (Ge Stoks, 2002). As suggested by Ge Stocks, Web-based instruction enables learners to have the possibility of being exposed to the target language by surfing the web. A comparative study by Felix (2001) investigated the effects of the Web-Based Writing Instruction Program on Taiwanese English Foreign Language (EFL) learners’ writing performance, writing apprehension and perceptions. The results indicated that Web-based language instruction produced better writing quality and more writing quantity than traditional classroom instruction (Braine, 1997). However, a few studies found that Web-based language instruction had non-significant or even negative effects (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 2001).
Osuna & Meskill (1998) recognise Web-based language instruction as a potential tool for writing by pointing out several advantages. These advantages include providing a relatively easy way to incorporate the internet into the language classroom, encouraging critical thinking, leading to more communication and interaction through group activities and eliciting greater learner motivation through interdisciplinary studies as well as “real-life” tasks.

Research by Osuna & Meskill (1998) also revealed that students perceived Web-based language instruction as effective for their language skills in general and for the development of specific language skills related to reading, speaking and writing. According to research conducted by Cobanoglu (2006) the findings indicated that students had positive attitudes toward using computers for learning language writing skills. It was also reported that the majority of Hong Kong 10th and 11th graders said that computer-based learning was enjoyable because they gained confidence in learning language via computer. They felt that the computer helped them improve their productive skills, writing and speaking, through developing their way of thinking, motivating them for more interaction and cooperation. In addition, Cobanoglu (2006) argued that students’ positive attitudes to computer accessed activities used by learners are language learning motivated them to approve of learning. He further added that the teaching strategies exploited via computer enabled the students to achieve more in examinations.

Miranda (2005) examined the phenomenon of students’ positive and negative responses to using computer as a language learning approach. He concluded that there is a relationship between students’ attitudes toward the type of teaching/learning and their attitudes toward certain computer activities. In other words, students’ good attitudes toward Web-based learning helped them benefit from technology in learning language skills. Braine (2004) argues that teachers agreed that computers were a useful tool for teaching writing skills. They believed the most
popular application of computers was word processing. Teachers, according to Braine, listed three ways to use computers as a writing tool: editing drafts, submitting papers and providing feedback. They believed that computers could equip them with an easy tool for editing their teaching materials and for providing feedback on student work.

2.6 ATTITUDES OF LEARNERS REGARDING WRITING ACTIVITIES

Brown (2006) argues that the attitude learners have towards a language will have either a positive or negative influence on their desire and hence, their ability, to achieve proficiency in the language. He further states that having a positive attitude towards the language is an important contributor to the success of language learning. A positive attitude brings out greater overall effort on the part of language learners, and typically results in greater success in terms of global language proficiency and competence in specific language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. To add to Brown’s views, Choy (2002) posits that a positive attitude also helps learners maintain their language skills after classroom instruction is over.

Learners can develop and maintain a positive attitude in the language classroom if instructional activities and materials used are exciting, stimulating and interesting to them. In classes, teachers mostly focus on sentence level problems and try to correct the compositions sentence by sentence. As stated by Nelson and Carson (2002) this causes students not to be able to transform their thoughts into writing and tends to privilege product over process. The need for EFL composition instructors, therefore, is not to cast-aside sentence level learning but to find new and better ways to do it. Moreover, teachers should pay attention to the attitudes learners bring to language learning, as teachers may have to overturn negative views towards the language learning process.
Factors like better teaching strategies, classroom and social environment can drastically reduce negative attitudes and lead to high competence in writing a language (Choy, 2002). Low second-language proficiency in English was connected by Olivas and Li (2006) to poor academic performance of international students studying at both university and college levels in the United States. It was further found that although many ESL students at university have a general understanding of grammar rules, not many are able to write academically at levels expected from them. This finding is in support of Zhu, (2004) who attributed poor academic writing skills as a key factor in the failure of international students to meet institutional literacy expectations.

In second language learning context, age, gender, language background, type of school attended and peer influences are some of the variables that influence language writing and attitudes toward writing (Merisou-Strom, 2007). Attitudes are often shaped early in childhood by the social context, such as parents and peers’ attitudes (Brown, 2006), as well as contact with other cultures. Social context also determines provision and practice for second language learning at home. Brown (2006) states that, families that have positive attitudes towards English might provide reading and writing materials and practice language skills in an informal learning context. He further posits that learners with positive attitudes will spend more effort to learn the language by using strategies such as asking questions and volunteering to writing activities. Brown, (2006) believes attitudes can affect the rate of development and the final proficiency achieved in a language. He further argues that difficult essay topics can create negative attitudes towards writing in learners which in turn may lead to low competence levels in writing in general.

Gabrielatos (2002) points out that learners need to be involved in the process of creating positive attitudes to writing and need enough practice in a variety of writing activities such as analyzing
the text for elements of good writing, identifying problems, ordering jumbled sentences to make a paragraph or jumbled paragraphs to make a text, finding topics and supporting ideas. For learners to achieve positive attitudes to writing activities Fairclough (2003) argues that more individualized work is essential even though classes are crowded. Writing, according to him is power and to gain such power, learners should learn to write and write to learn. Yet Witte (2007) found that learners showed little interest in classroom writing activities and assignments. According to him some learners, dislike writing in general and thus hate writing no matter in which language. Passive learners viewed English writing as just another subject to pass, without any necessity and practicality in their future which showed that they did not enjoy the writing activities. Similarly Ackerman (2006) states that many students consider writing as a classroom chore and that they would only write when asked by the teacher.

Given the importance of writing activities for students’ future lives, education systems need to ensure that students have both the interest and the motivation to continue learning to write beyond school. Abu-Bakar (2009) argues that daily writing practice would help improve learners’ writing skills as it trains them to put their thoughts into words. In addition Fulmer and Frijters (2011) said that writing practice might also help ESL learners to learn new vocabulary since learners could participate willingly in activities they find interesting and important. To add to these views, Holmes (2004) also argues that what students in writing classes need is enough practice on activities such as good writing, as well as finding topics and supporting ideas. He further adds that to achieve this goal, more individualized work is essential if classes were to be effective.
2.7 MOTIVATION, SELF-EFFICACY AND LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

Schunk (2009) defines motivation as the process of instigating and sustaining goal-directed activities. He asserts that motivation helps us understand why people behave as they do. In addition to this, motivation plays an important role in learning. It is also argued that if learners are motivated to learn, they attend to instruction and engage in such activities as rehearsing information, relating it to previously acquired knowledge and asking questions. According to Schunk (2009) and Kassen (2002) motivated learners exert more effort rather than quit when they encounter difficult writing tasks. Schunk further argues that motivated learners choose to work on tasks when they are not required to do so in their spare time, meaning that learners engage in activities that facilitate learning. He further adds that highly motivated learners establish classroom environment that builds self-efficacy which improves writing performance. Atkinson (2003) also reports that motivation has a positive effect on learners’ performance in learning language skills, including writing. Instead of just checking accuracy and correctness of language and grading paper, Hedge (2000) stresses the importance of teachers as facilitators and guides in getting learners through the writing process successfully. To add to this, Pratt-Johnson (2008) posits that learners should be provided with feedback of their writing even if classes are overcrowded. He further adds that quality of feedback given to learners can advance their academic writing skills further.

2.8 DIFFICULTY AND COMPETENCY IN WRITING ACTIVITIES

Although writing is one of the important language skills, many students consider it as the most difficult and complex activity to develop and learn, especially in an English Foreign Language (EFL) context (Trang, 2009). This is in line with what Ackerman (2006) reports, that up to 40%
of learners in high schools are not doing well in writing classes which relates to the Namibian situation where the majority of learners achieved D to G symbols and few achieved A+ to C symbols in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 examinations. Some of the problems outlined by ESL learners in previous studies by Miranda, (2005) were that essays required too much writing time and that learners were not familiar with the topics they were given to write about. The unfamiliarity of the given topic makes the writing activities very difficult for learners. Ong and Zhang (2010) as well as by Hidi and Boscolo (2006) posit that a student’s level of concern with writing will depend on how competent he or she feels in writing and able to carrying out a writing task. Grabe and Kaplan (2000) states that a common problem in writing is the writers’ difficulty in beginning to compose writing task which is called block.

In order to assist learners to overcome difficulties in writing, Myles (2002) posits that it is necessary to examine what students actually think and do when they write. Teachers can stimulate students’ thinking through various pre-writing strategies. He further argues that limited knowledge of vocabulary, language structure and content constrains a second language writer’s performance. In addition to this he also stated that, since writing is learnt through practice, teachers should provide positive and cooperative learning feedback.

2.9 PERCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO GENDER IN WRITING ACTIVITIES

It is stated by Visscher and Dreary (2010) that there is evidence to suggest that boys in the UK and America underperform when compared to girls in English assessment. They further said that the previous research has also found that males underperform in written language tasks in comparison to females. In support of this, Kellogg (2008) states that even though all young writers are likely to find it difficult to consider their audience in writing, it is possible that
females develop meta-cognitive skills at an earlier age, which may impact on their written language skills. To add to this Walker (2005) states that females have shown to be more advanced than males in tasks where learners are able to fake or imagine stories to write about.

In terms of writing style, Jones and Myhill (2007) contended that both boys and girls show equivalent writing patterns, yet also note that boys were often at the upper and lower ends of writing while girls fell somewhere in the middle. To add to this, it is also argued that it is not males’ underlying skills in reading and writing that result in less writing ability scores, but the quality of their ideas as well as the approach they have to free writing. Jones and Myhill (2007) further argue that boys and girls might engage with the written activity but it might be possible the topic of narrative is more appealing to girls than to boys, so girls would score higher.

2.10 LEARNER CHARACTERISTICS ACROSS SCHOOLS

A study was conducted by Zwick (2002) on how learner characteristics vary across schools. Results from this study suggested that differences between schools in learners’ reported characteristics were far less pronounced than the differences within schools. This according to him might suggest that, in most countries, comparatively few schools stand out as being particularly likely to have learners who report being well-motivated, confident and using effective strategies. It is possible that some students with hard-working classmates understate the amount of effort and persistence they put in, compared to learners with less hard-working classmates, even though it is the absolute amount of effort they add to Zwick’s findings, Cambira (2010) argues that even though schools differ with regard to the learner characteristics of their intake, even in schools that are performing well there are learners who lack confidence and motivation and who are not inclined to set and monitor their own learning goals.
2.11 TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ESL WRITING SKILL IN THE NAMIBIAN CONTEXT

As already mentioned, the Namibia ESL syllabus and the ESL policy for Namibian education advocates the Communicative Language Teaching theory. For this reason, the ESL syllabus for all grades aims at developing learners’ ability to communicate accurately, appropriately and effectively both in writing and speaking (Ministry of Education, 2010b). It further encourages learners to develop a wide vocabulary and to communicate persuasively and accurately with a strong sense of clarity. In addition, it requires learners to work with the different writing activities and genres for specified audiences. Furthermore, the ESL syllabus aims at enabling learners to understand and respond appropriately to what they hear, read and experience.

The Namibian ESL syllabi, whether primary, junior or senior secondary, allow learners to communicate in writing through the production of well-organized, coherent pieces of writing. This means learners develop and organize ideas into coherent sentences, paragraphs and whole texts. In addition, they should be able to write with enthusiasm and maturity to produce a reader-friendly style. Learners are also encouraged to use complete sentences in a paragraph to describe a particular idea. To add to this, learners are encouraged to use introductory, developmental and concluding paragraphs where ideas are linked to each other.

Learners are also required to write in a style appropriate to the audience (Ministry of Education, 2010b). The ESL syllabus also encourages teachers to teach learners how to write at matters to school success. To a wide range of texts for specific purposes successfully. For example, how to write formal and informal letters, newspaper or magazine articles, reports, essays, summaries, speeches and book or film reviews. The ESL syllabus also aims at guiding ESL teachers in
teaching the spelling of words and punctuation to learners in order for them to produce well-written pieces of writing. Adding to this, the ESL syllabus enables ESL teachers to teach appropriate grammar usage to learners in order to use appropriate grammatical structures in their writing. The ESL syllabus allows for equipping learners with appropriate vocabulary to use in different contents and situations of their writing.

According to the English language policy for Namibian Schools (Ministry of Education, 1998), it is extremely important that learners have sufficient writing practice, and therefore, it is recommended that teachers set learners at least one writing task per week. Finally, a marking grid for continuous writing is produced for all grades to guide the teacher in marking the written texts done in the ESL classrooms. This language policy encourages learners to start a journal or diary as this would encourage free and independent writing. It further suggests that a few minutes at the start of a lesson could be allocated once a week for learners to write in their journals.

In spite of well developed curricula and syllabi for ESL the performance of learners in ESL remained extremely poor over recent years. On national level in 2008, the cumulative percentages of results in ESL for the NSSC examination indicate that a mere 5.63% of learners achieved A+ to B grades, 52.65% achieved a C to E grades and 28.61% achieved F to G grade while 13.11% achieved a U (Ungraded) grade. In 2009 the results once again indicated that only 4.52% of learners achieved A+ to B grades, 56.34% achieved a C to E grades and 28.88% achieved F to G grades while 10.26% achieved a U grade. In 2010 the results still indicated that the lowest percentage of learners (5.4%) achieved A+ to B, 54.2% achieved C to E grades which was the highest percentage. The other percentage of (30.9%) achieved F and G grades while 9.5% of learners achieved a U symbol (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2009b, 2010a).
On regional level in the same years, Windhoek indicated lower percentages in higher grades A+, A, B, C and higher percentages in lower grades D, E, F, G and U. These statistics clearly show that the performance of Namibian learners in ESL writing is extremely poor (Ministry of Education, 2008, 2009b, 2010a). The poor performance in English may be one of the main contributing factors of high failure rates in schools, since all examinations are done through writing English.

2.12 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the theoretical framework and literature review of this study. The Communicative Language Teaching theory, based on the work of Hymes (1972), forms the theoretical framework. The literature review focused on the development of ESL writing and ESL teaching approaches related to communicative language writing and composition. The teaching and learning of writing skills in the Namibian context were also reviewed. The prescribed writing skills required from ESL learners in Namibia and factors that play a role in writing competence and positive attitudes of learners towards language writing activities are also explained. The difficulties learners encountered in writing activities and how these difficulties affect learners’ competency in writing was also outlined. How motivation exerts more effort on learning to write by increasing self-efficacy in learners to perform well in language writing activities was also discussed. Finally, factors that play a role in writing and gender differences, learner characteristics across schools as well as the regional and national statistical analyses of the 2008, 2009 and 2010 examination results was also outlined. The next chapter will indicate and explain the methods that were used to gather data in this research.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter highlights the methods that were used to gather data in this study. It also indicates the research design, the population, sample, as well as the sampling procedures that were used. Research instruments that were used to gather data, the pilot study, data collection procedures, data analysis, ethical considerations, as well as the biographical information of learners and teachers, are also discussed in this section.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

The study used a mixed-method, non-experimental design that involved a survey. The advantage of a survey is that information about a large number of people could be inferred from a smaller group of participants (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The mixed-method design allowed the researcher to obtain data through both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative data were collected using a questionnaire. Qualitative data were obtained via focus-group discussions and open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The aim of the focus-group discussion was to obtain in-depth insight into the issues that were addressed in the questionnaire.

3.3 POPULATION

The population comprised all Grade 11 learners taking English as a Second language, as well as all the teachers teaching English as a Second language to senior secondary learners in Windhoek Senior Secondary schools. Grade 12 teachers were also included to ensure a usable sample of teachers because a number of teachers teach both Grades 11 and 12.
3.4 SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Of the government senior secondary schools in Windhoek, three were used to gather data. The schools were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling (Schumacher, 2006) is a type of sampling that allows choosing small groups of individuals who are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon of interest. One higher-performing (HPS), one middle-performing (APS) and one lower-performing school (LPS) were included in the study. The three schools were chosen on the basis of how learners performed in ESL writing in the 2008, 2009 and 2010 national examinations.

A total of 300 Grade 11 learners were included in the sample. The method of selection of learners in each school was random sampling of full class groups. The researcher attempted to include equal numbers of males and females in the sample to compare their views. The teachers were selected on the basis that they were Grade 11 and Grade 12 English Second Language teachers in the sampled schools. In each of the schools all teachers were selected.

One focus-group discussion with Grade 11 learners from each of the sampled schools was also carried out. From each of the three schools 10 learners were randomly selected to participate in the focus-group discussions, making the total 30 learners.

3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Questionnaires for both ESL learners and their ESL teachers were used to gather data. The first part of the learners’ questionnaire collected biographical information of the learners. The second part sought information on how much learners enjoyed doing English writing activities, as well as why they enjoyed or did not enjoy these activities. It also looked at how important learners considered each writing activity in present, as well as in future, learning. In addition to this, the
questionnaire also focused on how activity, as well as why they considered the activities as
difficult or easy. Learners were also asked to say how competent they felt they were in each
writing activity. They were also asked the extent to which they perceived the ESL teacher’s
support in their writing activities. Lastly, they were asked to suggest ways in which they felt the
ESL teachers could assist them to improve their competency in each writing activity.

A teachers’ questionnaire was used to collect data from ESL teachers. The first part collected
biographical information of the teachers. In the next section, teachers were asked the extent to
which they enjoyed teaching each activity, as well as to give reasons for enjoying or not enjoying
teaching the activities. They were also asked about the importance of each writing activity, the
difficulties they encountered and how competent they felt they were in teaching these writing
activities. Another section of the questionnaire inquired how much support they obtained from
the Ministry of Education and other senior teachers. In addition, they were also asked about the
strategies they had in place to cope with the high demands in teaching ESL writing activities.
The last part of the questionnaire explored how they coped with the marking or grading of the
writing activities and reasons for their coping and not coping.

3.6 PILOT STUDY

The researcher piloted the questionnaires by administering it to ESL teachers and learners at a
school that was not part of the main study sample. This was done in order to identify ambiguities
in the questionnaires. This helped the researcher to rephrase the questions in the questionnaires
before they reached the sampled schools to ensure the questions were well understood.
3.7 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

First of all, permission was obtained from the Regional Director of the Khomas Region to visit the schools for research purposes. After receiving permission, letters were written to the principals of the sampled schools to ask for permission to administer questionnaires and conduct focus-group discussions with the ESL learners. After permission was granted, the researcher visited the three schools to administer the questionnaires to both ESL learners and teachers. The schools were visited at different times since they are in different locations. After questionnaires were given to the sampled groups, the researcher waited for the completed questionnaires before leaving the school. This was done to avoid losing some of the questionnaires.

After collecting and analysing all the questionnaires, the researcher went back to the sampled schools to conduct the focus-group discussion to obtain more in-depth information on some of the issues that were raised in the questionnaires. In these, the selected groups assessed the problem, concern or idea (Schumacher, 2006). Further assessment of the problem was guided by the researcher who asked questions, prompting for additional answers or ideas from the respondents, for example, why they like or dislike essay writing.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative analyses of data. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages, were used to analyse the quantitative data. Chi-square analyses were also used to determine whether there were any significant differences in the responses of participants based on variables such as gender and level of the performance of schools.
Qualitative data were obtained from focus group discussions, as well as open-ended questions in the questionnaires. For qualitative data analysis, the researcher examined the data in depth after which data were categorised, coded and grouped into themes to provide in-depth insight with regard to the research questions (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information they provided. They were assured that the information they provided would only be used for the purpose of research. They were also requested not to write their names on the questionnaires. They were not forced to participate in the research but they participated voluntarily. Lastly, respondents were informed of the importance of their answers to the validity of this study and were thus encouraged to give truthful answers.

3.10 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the methods used to gather data in this study. The mixed-method, non-experimental design which involved a survey was used. Questionnaires were used to collect data as they have the advantage of obtaining information about a large number of participants. Focus-group discussions and open-ended questions in the questionnaire were used to obtain more in-depth information. The sample included 3 schools from Windhoek. Questionnaires for both ESL learners and their ESL teachers were used to gather data. The data collection procedures used in the study was also discussed.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH RESULTS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the study. Findings are presented in different forms that include descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages. Chi-square analyses were also used to determine if there were any significant differences in the responses of participants based on variables such as gender and performance level of schools.

In the first section the biographical information of ESL learners and teachers are discussed as well as the results of the perceptions of learners with regard to enjoyment and usefulness of ESL writing activities. This is followed by their perceived competencies in ESL writing activities. In addition to this, the kinds of support learners receive from their teachers and suggestions how their ESL teachers could assist them in their mastering of ESL writing activities are also discussed.

The second section discusses the perceptions of ESL teachers with regard to how much they enjoyed and found the writing activities important to teach. Their perceived competencies with regard to the ESL writing activities they taught are also discussed as well as the support they received from the Ministry of Education. The NSSC syllabus for ordinary level outlines some writing activities to be taught to the ESL learners as follows: writing essays, letters, newspaper/magazine articles, reports, book/film reviews, summaries, poems, diaries and grammar activities. These activities according to the syllabus would improve extensive, critical reading as well as enable learners to write appropriately for specific purposes (Ministry of Education, 2010b).
4.2 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF LEARNERS IN THE PRESENT STUDY

The biographical information of learners in the sample focused on sex, age, mother tongue, performance in ESL, as well as Grade average performance during the first term examination of 2009.

4.2.1 Sex of Learners

Three hundred questionnaires were handed to learners and of these, 286 were used for data analyses while fourteen respondents did not answer questions sufficiently for data analyses. From this total of 286 learners, 166 (58%) were females and 120 (42%) were males.

4.2.2 Age of Learners

The age of learners ranged from sixteen to twenty years. Five percent of these learners were 20 years. The nineteen-year olds comprised 12% while the eighteen-year olds comprised 24%. The majority, 54.0%, were seventeen years old, while 5% were 16 years old.

Table 4.1 Ages of Grade 11 Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>54.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>286</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.3 Mother Tongue

The majority of learners (38%) spoke Oshiwambo as their first language, followed by 25% who spoke Afrikaans. Furthermore, 19% spoke Otjiherero, 7.0% spoke Damara-Nama, 0.7% spoke Silozi and 7.0% spoke other languages. Those who spoke Rukwangali made up 2.0% and 1.0% spoke Khoekhoegowab. There were only a few Grade 11 ESL learners who spoke English as their first language (0.7%). See Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Mother Tongue of Learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother Tongue</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oshiwambo</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Otjiherero</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damara</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rukwangali</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khoekhoegowab</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silozi</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286

4.2.4 ESL Performance and Grade Point Average

In the questionnaire learners were asked to mention the percentages they obtained in the first ESL examination of 2010 as well as their Grade point average in the same examination. For both ESL performance and Grade point average, five categories were used 0-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60-69, and 70-100 percent. Performance was based on learners’ accounts of their performance and were
not verified via school records. This would have compromised confidentiality since the researcher would then have had to match questionnaires to specific names.

It can be seen from Table 4.3 that the majority of learners (39%) scored 50 to 59 percent in ESL the examination of the year ending 2009. Those who performed between 70 and 100 percent in ESL made up a very small percentage of the sample (8%). Those who scored from 0 to 39 percent made up 6% while those who scored from 40 to 49 percent made up 27%. It is also indicated that 27% scored 60 to 69 percent in ESL Similarly learners were asked to indicate their Grade point average for the 2010 first term examinations. Results indicated that 3% had a Grade point average of between 0 and 39%, 25% had between 40 and 49% while 41% of the learners had between 50 and 59% and the other 25% of them had a Grade point average of between 60% and 69%. Those who scored a Grade point average of between 70% and 100% made up a small group, 8% (see Table 4.3). It can be noted from these results that only a few learners scored higher percentages of 70 to 100, while the largest percentage was for those who scored 50 to 59%.

Table 4.3 Performance in ESL and grade point average of the sampled group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Categories</th>
<th>0-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70-100</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners in each category</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance in ESL</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>26.5</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Point Average (GPA)</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286
4.3 BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF TEACHERS

The biographical information of teachers focused on gender, number of years of teaching Grade 11 and 12 ESL, as well as their teaching qualifications. Only six teachers completed the questionnaire which is considered a limitation to the study, although this included all the teachers in the sampled schools who taught ESL.

4.3.1 Sex of Teachers

From the total of six teachers, five were female and only one was male. Questionnaires were handed to these six teachers, and all the questionnaires were used for data analyses.

4.3.2 Teaching Experience

Teachers were asked to indicate how long they had been teaching ESL to Grade 11 and Grade 12 learners. The results indicated that none of the teachers had taught ESL for less than two years. The categories in the questionnaire were: 0 to 2 years, 2 to 4 years and more than four years. Two of them (33%) indicated that they had taught for two to four years, while four of them (67%) indicated that they had more than four years teaching experience in Grade 11 and 12 ESL.

4.3.3 Teaching Qualifications

In the questionnaire, teachers could select from one of the four teaching qualification categories that described their teaching qualifications best. None of them indicated not having had formal training or having a teacher training diploma. Two teachers indicated that they had teaching degrees while four of them indicated that they were post-graduate degree holders. All teachers were thus fully qualified.
4.3.4 Performance differences between the three selected schools

As was mentioned before, three schools were selected based on their performance level in ESL from 2008 to 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2009b; 2010a).

Table 4.4 Average percentages of learners obtaining A+ to D symbols in the lower, average and higher performing schools from 2008 to 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols</th>
<th>LPS</th>
<th>APS</th>
<th>HPS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average % of learners per symbol 2008-2010</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A+, A</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below D</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4 clearly indicates that a higher percentage of learners in higher performing schools obtained A to C symbols in the 2008 to 2010 examinations compared to those in the average performing schools. Similarly those in the average performing schools obtained better symbols than those in the lower performing schools. When results for the three examinations were compared, it became clear that there was a big difference between the performances of the three schools in English as a Second Language. It was also noticed that high percentages of learners in all three schools obtained symbols below D (Ministry of Education, 2008; 2009b; 2010a).
4.4 LEARNERS’ PERCEPTIONS ON THE ENJOYMENT AND USEFULNESS OF ESL WRITING ACTIVITIES

Two questions were asked in the learners’ questionnaire to assess the perceptions of learners with regard to ESL writing activities. The questions attempted to determine how much the learners enjoyed doing each of the ESL writing activities and how useful they considered each activity at the present time and in their future lives.

4.4.1 Perceived Level of Enjoyment of Writing Activities

When one looks at Table 4.5 below, it becomes clear that relatively few learners indicated that they liked the different writing activities very much. The highest percentages under the category “very much” were for grammar activities (33%), the writing of poems and letters (27% each) and the writing of summaries (25%). The writing activities selected for this study are based on the activities outlined in the grade 11 and 12 syllabus. These activities are; writing essays or compositions, writing book or film reviews, writing reports, articles, letters, diaries and grammar activities.
### Table: 4.5 Enjoyment with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing activity</th>
<th>Level of enjoyment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No respons</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays/ Composition**</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters*</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper Articles**</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Report**</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/ Film Reviews**</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries*</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems*</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries**</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities*</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286

**Note:**

*Most liked activities (combining two positive responses)

**Not liked activity (combining two negative responses)

The writing activities that were not liked at all by relatively high percentages of learners were the keeping of diaries (32%), the writing of book or film reviews (26%), writing newspaper articles (26%) and writing reports (24%).

In combining the two negative responses (“not at all” and “somewhat”) and the two positive responses (“much” and “very much”) the following was revealed from the data: the most popular or most liked writing activities were the writing of letters (59%), grammar activities (58%), writing summaries (54%) and writing poems (50%). The most unpopular or most disliked writing activities were: writing newspaper articles (66%), writing reports (59%) writing
book/film reviews (59%), keeping diaries (54%) and writing essays (48%). When the researcher looked at the average responses of all the writing activities, it became clear that 19% of learners did not like English writing activities at all, 31% liked it only somewhat, 25% liked it much and 22% liked it very much.

An open-ended question in the questionnaire probed learners why they enjoyed or did not enjoy the writing activities listed in the questionnaire. Analyses of data from this open-ended question revealed four main reasons for learners to enjoy writing activities. Eighty respondents (28%) said that they enjoyed these writing activities because the activities improved their language and vocabulary proficiency. Thirty-five learners (12%) said that they enjoyed the writing activities because these activities were of great importance to them. Another thirty-five (12%) learners indicated that these writing activities were enjoyed because of the topics they were given to write about while twenty-three learners (8%) said they just enjoyed these activities.

Further analyses of data from this open-ended question in the questionnaire revealed three main reasons for learners not enjoying the writing activities. Eighteen learners said that they did not enjoy the writing activities because these activities were difficult, and they needed too much thinking and too much writing, which made them run out of words. Another ten respondents said the writing activities were not enjoyable because teachers limited them to one topic only, and that their work was never looked at by the teacher. The other two respondents did not enjoy these writing activities for reasons such as that they hated writing since it was time wasting and useless, as well as that the topics given were boring.

From the focus-group discussion, comprising thirty participants, the following main reasons for enjoying the writing activities were expressed. Fifteen participants said activities were easy. Five
said the writing activities helped to enlarge their subject knowledge. Another five said the activities were enjoyable because they were provided with an opportunity to use their own words, while the last five said these activities promoted creativity and the development of own imagination in learners.

Regarding reasons for not enjoying the writing activities, based on the focus group discussions, fifteen learners said they did not enjoy the writing activities because they were lazy to write and think. Ten of them said they did not enjoy the writing activities because the teacher did not look at their work, while five said they disliked the writing activities because the grades they scored were very low.

4.4.2 Perceived Level of Usefulness of Writing Activities

Learners were asked whether they found the ESL writing activities useful to them now and in their future lives. Table 4.6 below clearly indicates that the number of learners that found these writing activities useful were not very high. The highest percentages under the category “very useful” were for writing letters (42%), grammar activities (38%) and keeping diaries (30%).
Table 4.6: Usefulness with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays/Compositions*</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters*</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazine**</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports*</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing book/Film Reviews**</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries*</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems**</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries*</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities*</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286

Note:
*Useful (combining the positive responses)

**Not useful (combining the negative responses)

The writing activities that were seen as not useful at all by a high percentage of learners were the writing of poems (25.2%), the writing of book or film reviews (23.1%), the keeping of diaries (17.8%) and the writing of newspaper or magazine articles (16.8%).

When the two negative responses (“not at all” and “a little bit”) and the two positive responses (“useful” and “very useful”) were combined, the following was revealed from the data: the most
useful writing activities were writing letters (77%), grammar activities (66%), writing reports (62%), writing summaries (60%), writing essays (59%) and keeping diaries (53%). The least useful writing activities were: writing poems (49%), writing book/film reviews (49%) and writing newspaper/magazine articles (46%).

The average responses to all the writing activities indicated that 14% of learners found the ESL writing activities not useful at all, 21% found it a bit useful, 6% found it to be somewhat useful, 27% found it to be useful and 29% found it to be very useful.

No open-ended question was asked in the questionnaire with regard to the usefulness of writing activities. However, in the focus-group discussion, participants were asked to give reasons for the answers they gave about the usefulness of the writing activities. Fifteen of the thirty participants said that the activities trained them for the future which was why they believed these activities were useful. Eight of the participants felt the writing activities would improve their knowledge of writing and six felt the activities were useful since they prepared them for the examination. The other participant said that the writing activities were useful since improved writing skills could provide job opportunities in future.

4.5 PERCEIVED COMPETENCIES AND INVOLVEMENT OF LEARNERS IN WRITING ACTIVITIES

Three questions were asked to assess the respondents’ perceived competency with regard to the ESL writing activities expected of them in the ESL classrooms. The first question asked how competent learners felt they were in each of the writing activities they did. The second was how difficult they considered each of the writing activities to be. The last question asked was how
often learners practised the mentioned writing activities on their own without being asked by the teacher.

4.5.1 Learners’ Perceived Competence

Table 4.7 clearly indicates that high percentages of learners felt that they had either high or very high competence in most of the ESL writing activities. The highest percentages under the two categories ‘high’ and ‘very high’ were for grammar activities (26.9% plus 29.4%) which is equal to 56.3%, the writing of summaries (22.7% plus 31.8%) which is equal to 54.5%, the keeping of diaries (21.7% plus 8.4%) which equals 30.1%, the writing of letters (41.6% plus 16.8%) which is equal to 58.4% and the writing of poems (21%) plus (21%) equals (42%). Relatively few learners indicated very low or low competence in the majority of the activities.

The percentage of learners that felt that they were somewhat competent in the ESL writing activities was for most of the categories above 30%. The average responses to all the writing activities clearly showed that 7% of learners reported having very low competence in the ESL writing activities, 14% indicated that they had low competence, 33% said they were somewhat competent, 28% said they had high competence while 16% said they had very high competence in the writing activities. When the two positive and the two negative responses are combined it shows that 44% of learners felt they were highly or very highly competent in ESL writing activities and only 21% felt they had low or very low competence in these activities.
Table 4.7: Perceived competence with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>Level of Competence</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>Very Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Some</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Very High</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>what</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Competence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays**</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters*</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>41.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazine Articles**</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports**</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Books**</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries*</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>22.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems**</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries**</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>28.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities*</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286

Note:
*High competence (combining positive responses)

**Low competence (combining negative responses)

4.5.2 Learners’ Perceived Difficulties in Writing Activities

Learners were also asked whether they had encountered any difficulties in the ESL writing activities they were taught. Table 4.8 indicates that the number of learners that found the ESL writing activities to be easy was very high compared to those who said the activities were difficult.
### Table 4.8: Perceived difficulties with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>No Response</th>
<th>very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays*</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters*</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazine Articles**</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports**</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/Film Reviews**</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries*</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems**</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>46.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries**</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>51.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities*</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>55.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286

Note:

* Easy (combining positive responses)

** Difficult (combining negative responses)

The highest percentages under the category “easy” were for writing letters (68.2), writing summaries (60.8%), writing of essays (52.3%) and grammar activities (55.9). Some writing activities, such as writing book or film reviews (21.7%), writing newspaper/magazine articles (19.2%) and writing reports (18.5%) were regarded as difficult by several respondents.

When the negative responses (difficult and very difficult) on one hand, and the positive responses (easy and very easy) on the other, were combined the following was indicated in the data: the easiest writing activities appeared to be the writing of letters (69%), the writing of summaries (61%) and grammar activities (56%). The writing activities that were regarded as difficult or very difficult were writing book or film review (33%), the writing of newspaper or magazine articles (28%) and the writing of reports (27%). The average responses for all the
writing activities showed that 8% of learners saw the ESL writing activities as very difficult; 13% saw these activities as difficult; 30% saw the activities as somewhat difficult; 47% said these writing activities were easy; while only (1%) said the writing activities were very easy.

An open-ended question in the questionnaire was asked to prompt more in-depth responses. Respondents were asked to state some of the difficulties they encountered in writing the mentioned writing activities. From a total of 286 respondents, only 202 responded to this question. The following are some of the difficulties mentioned: Spelling some English words correctly (13.9%), losing or running out of ideas (12.4%), using tenses correctly (11.4%), as well as difficulties in introducing and concluding their writing activities (10.4%). The responses of all the learners are summarised in Table 4.9. In the focus-group discussion, participants were also asked about the difficulties they encountered in ESL writing activities. Participants indicated difficulties such as that it was not easy to formulate titles in essays, arrange ideas in order and identify main points in summaries.
Table 4.9: Respondents’ difficulties encountered in doing ESL activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too many words to write</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling or writing words correctly</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Running out of ideas</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Tenses</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introducing and concluding a piece of writing</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to understand some topics</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too much Thinking</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Paragraphs in order</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time given to complete task too short</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult formats or layouts</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not allowed to choose own topic</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using punctuation marks correctly</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using own words in summaries</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 202

4.5.3 Voluntary involvement in ESL Writing activities

Learners were also asked to say how often they engaged in ESL writing activities on their own without being asked by the teacher to do so. The writing activities that were often written by a high percentage of learners on their own were the writing of letters (26.6%) and the writing of summaries (21%).
Table 4.10: Frequency with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>Voluntary involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essay**</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters *</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Maga**</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports **</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/Film**</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries *</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems *</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries*</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities *</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286

Note:

* Often (combining positive responses)

**Rarely/Never (combining negative responses)

Research results as shown in Table 4.10 clearly indicate that the majority of learners never or rarely did the ESL writing activities on their own. For voluntary writing the table also indicates that the highest percentages under the “never” category were for the writing of book or film reviews (48.6%), writing newspaper or magazine articles (44.4%) as well as writing reports (41.3%).

In combining the negative responses and the positive responses, data indicated that the writing activities most written voluntarily were the following: writing letters (42%), writing summaries (37%), writing poems (37%), keeping diaries (36%), and grammar activities (33.2%). Activities that were never or rarely done by learners were the writing newspaper or magazine articles (70%), the writing of book or film reviews (69%), the writing of reports (66%) and the writing of essays (63%).
The average responses of all the writing activities showed that 33% of learners never engaged in the ESL writing activities on their own while 21% said they rarely engaged in these activities. Some of the respondents said that they did the activities sometimes (16%). Fifteen percent of learners said that they often did these ESL writing activities voluntarily while 12% of them said they did them very often.

4.6 LEARNER SUPPORT

The researcher also investigated the type of support ESL learners received from their teachers in their ESL writing activities.

4.6.1 Support ESL Learners get from ESL Teachers

Research results indicated that learners received support from their teachers in most of the ESL writing activities. However, there were also a substantial percentage of learners who felt that they received very little (14.7%) or little (14.3%) support from their teachers.

Table 4.11: ESL Learners’ support from ESL teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>No support</th>
<th>Very little</th>
<th>Little support</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Much support</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazi</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing book/film review</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>23.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>39.5</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>23.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 286
4.6.2 Suggestions by ESL Learners on how their ESL Teachers could assist them in improving ESL Writing tasks

Respondents were also asked to indicate how they wanted their teachers to assist them in their ESL writing. In answer to an open-ended question in the questionnaire, a total of 185 respondents gave their suggestions. Learners suggested their teachers could give them more practical exercises in class; this was suggested by 83 learners (45%). A total of 53 respondents (29.1%) suggested that teachers should focus on difficult topics; 21 respondents (11%) suggested that teachers should improve their way of teaching, while 20 suggested giving more reading and writing activities to their learners (11.1%). Seven of the learners (4.1%) suggested that teachers should show interest in their learning and the last 1% suggested that teachers should give learners extra classes.

The same question was asked in the focus-group discussion to generate more ideas. Some of the suggestions given in the focus-group discussion were similar to those given in the open-ended question in the questionnaire. In general, suggestions were few and some of them did not make sense, like “stop these activities.” However, many participants in the focus-group discussion showed some understanding of the need for writing activities in ESL classrooms, and suggestions of a more positive nature were that teachers should expose learners more often to these activities, as well as pay more attention to their learners’ learning. Table 4.12 shows a list of suggestions given by the respondents about how they wanted their ESL teachers to assist them in their ESL writing activities.
Table 4.12: Learners’ suggestions as to what assistance they should be given by their ESL teachers to improve their learning of ESL writing activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suggestions by ESL learners</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Motivate learners</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give more activities for homework</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve way of teaching</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow learners to read and write more</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers should show interest in learners’ learning</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give extra classes to learners</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.7 TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS ON IMPORTANCE AND ENJOYMENT OF TEACHING ESL WRITING ACTIVITIES

In the teachers’ questionnaire the perceptions of teachers were assessed by asking them how much they enjoyed teaching each of the writing activities they taught in the ESL classroom, as well as how important they considered each writing activity to be. As was mentioned earlier only six teachers were included in the sample.

4.7.1 Level of Enjoyment in the Teaching of Writing Activities

It is clear from Table 4.13 that the number of teachers who liked teaching the different writing activities very much was high. The highest number under this category were for the teaching of writing poems (4), the writing of essays (3) and the writing of grammar activities (3). The only writing activities that some teachers did not like to teach at all were the writing of essays, letters and newspaper or magazine articles.
Combining the two negative responses (“not at all” and “a little bit”) and the two positive responses (“much” and “very much”), the data revealed the following: the most-liked writing activities for teaching were the writing of newspaper or magazine articles, letter writing, the writing of poems, keeping diaries and grammar activities. Each of these categories was selected by 5 teachers each. The most disliked writing activities appear to be: writing reports, writing book/film reviews, writing of essays and writing summaries. Each of these categories was selected by only one teacher.

The average responses of all the writing activities showed that 6% of Grade 11 and 12 ESL teachers found the teaching of writing activities not enjoyable at all, 8% found it a bit enjoyable, 11% found it somewhat enjoyable, 46% found it much enjoyable while 28% found it to be very much enjoyable. An open-ended question in the questionnaire was asked to investigate why the ESL teachers enjoyed or did not enjoy teaching the writing activities listed in the questionnaire.
Analyses of data from this open-ended question revealed three main reasons for teachers enjoying the writing activities. Two respondents indicated that they enjoyed teaching these activities because these activities were factual. The other two said they enjoyed certain writing activities because these activities motivated learners a great deal since some were longer pieces which allowed learners to express their views in writing. The other two respondents said the activities were enjoyed because they were communicative activities which allowed learners to communicate through writing. Further analyses from the question where teachers were asked to give reasons as to why they did not enjoy teaching the writing activities indicated that they did not enjoy these writing activities because marking and grading were challenging, due to large class sizes.

### 4.7.2 Level of Importance of Writing Activities

The perceptions of teachers with regard to ESL writing activities were also measured by investigating how important they viewed each of the writing activities they taught. Table 4.14 indicates that most of the teachers found the writing activities very important. The highest number under this category was for writing essays and writing grammar activities which were considered very important by five of the six teachers.
Table 4.14: Importance with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>Level of Importance</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some what</td>
<td>Important</td>
<td>Very important</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays/Compositions</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>f</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing letters</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/ Magazine Articles</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/Film Reviews</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td></td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average in percentage</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N= 6

The writing activities that were seen as somewhat important by a small number of teachers were the writing of newspaper/magazine articles, writing reports and keeping diaries (one teacher each). None of the teachers considered these writing activities as having little or no importance.

The average responses to all the writing activities indicated that 6% of teachers found the ESL writing activities somewhat important, 24% found the activities to be important while 71% found them to be very important.

In an open-ended question in the questionnaire teachers were asked to give reasons why they considered these writing activities as important or not important. None of the teachers considered the activities as not important. The reasons they gave for considering the activities as important were that knowledge of these activities made learners good writers since the writing activities were used to assess learners’ knowledge in examinations; longer pieces improved spelling and grammar in ESL; knowledge of these activities built creativity and it also helped learners to acquire English as a Second Language.
4.8 PERCEIVED COMPETENCES OF TEACHERS WITH REGARD TO THE TEACHING
OF ESL WRITING ACTIVITIES

Two questions were asked in the questionnaire to measure teachers’ perceived competence with
regard to the teaching of ESL writing activities and the difficulties they encountered in their
teaching of ESL writing activities

4.8.1 Teachers’ Perceived Competences in Writing Activities

It is clear in Table 4.15 that the majority of teachers felt competent to very competent in their
teaching of ESL writing activities. Relatively few teachers indicated low levels of competence
for teaching writing newspaper or magazine articles and writing poems. Only one teacher
indicated low teaching competence for these activities.

Table 4.15: Teachers’ perceived competence with regard to each writing activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>Level of Competence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays/Compositions</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazine articles</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/Film Reviews</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average in percentage</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the two negative responses were added and the two positive responses were added, it was
found that most of the ESL teachers perceived themselves to be competent in most of the writing
activities. For the writing of essays and the writing of letters five of the six teachers felt very competent to teach the writing activities. Four of the six teachers felt very competent to teach the writing of reports, writing of book and film reviews, writing of summaries, writing of poems and keeping diaries. Negative responses indicated that teachers regarded themselves less competent in the teaching of newspaper writing and the writing of magazine articles and poems (one teacher each). The average responses concerning all the writing activities indicated that 4% of teachers felt somewhat competent in teaching the ESL writing activities, 31% felt competent while 65% of them indicated that they were very competent in teaching these writing activities.

An open-ended question in the questionnaire was also posed to assess the difficulties the respondents encountered in their teaching of ESL writing activities. Two of the respondents indicated that they experienced difficulties in their teaching because learners could not spell words correctly when writing. One respondent indicated the problem of a lack of teaching resources, and one said that learners were a problem, since they lacked creativity. Another respondent indicated that difficulties encountered were due to a lack of learner motivation, while the last respondent said one difficulty was because learners’ vocabulary was not well-developed enough to support the teaching of ESL.

4.9 SUPPORT FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION TO ESL TEACHERS

ESL teachers were asked to indicate how much support they received from the Ministry of Education on how to teach the ESL writing activities. Research results as shown in Table 4.16 clearly show that teachers felt that they did not get much support from the Ministry of Education. For all the activities, three or more teachers reported that they did not receive any help at all. It
was only for writing essays and writing letters that they perceived to receive some support, such as being given a marking grid to use when marking essays.

Table 4.16: ESL Teachers’ perceived support from the Ministry of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing Activity</th>
<th>Level of support</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Essays</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Letters</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Newspaper/Magazine articles</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Reports</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Book/Film Reviews</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Summaries</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Poems</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping Diaries</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar Activities</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average in percentage</td>
<td>f</td>
<td>58.0</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=6

In the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, teachers stated the type of support they needed from the Ministry of Education. Three respondents suggested being trained on how to teach all the levels of ESL. They specifically emphasised the need for training in the teaching of higher level literature. One respondent suggested that teachers should be trained once a year. Respondents also emphasised the need to receive more practical guidance rather than theoretical information.

4.10 STRATEGIES ESL TEACHERS EMPLOYED TO COPE WITH THE HIGH DEMANDS OF ESL TEACHING

Respondents were also asked in one of the open-ended questions of the questionnaire to state the strategies they utilised in their teaching of ESL writing activities that helped them cope with their
teaching. Two of them said they gave only one formative activity per term, since it allowed them more time to check and correct. One respondent gave writing activities to learners and ensured they worked together to accomplish the task. Another respondent used a strategy where learners were given much writing to do. To add to these mentioned strategies, one respondent believed in peer assessment, since it was believed learners learn each other. They also mentioned using internet resources. The other respondents said they did not have any strategy. The last strategy mentioned by the ESL teachers was the use of the Ministry’s devised marking grid for ESL writing activities.

Teachers’ were asked to state how they coped with the ESL marking or grading of the writing activities. Three of them said they found no difficulties, since they used the provided marking grid. One of them did not provide any response to this question. The other two respondents stated that having too many learners in a class (up to 48) was a difficulty regarding the marking of the writing activities. They elaborated that the more learners there were, the more marking had to be done especially in the writing activities mentioned in this study. Two other respondents mentioned that they could not cope with the marking because they had to mark each learner’s work. One respondent mentioned that it was difficult to mark, because the syllabus required the teaching of all writing activities.

Apart from the reasons given for not coping, respondents were also asked to give reasons why they coped with the teaching of these writing activities. One indicated coping because of the teaching experience in ESL. Two respondents stated that they coped because they understood their work, while two others indicated that they coped since they used the Ministry’s devised marking grid.
4.11 RESEARCH RESULTS BASED ON CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES

Chi-square analyses were used in the study to determine if there were any significant differences in the responses of learners based on gender and level of the performance of schools (research question 7). Only those chi-square analyses that yielded statistically significant differences are discussed in this section.

4.11.1 Gender and Enjoyment

Of the 286 learners included in the study 167 (58.3%) were girls while 119 (41.6%) were boys. Chi-square analyses were done to determine if there were significant differences between boys and girls’ perceptions with regard to the enjoyment and usefulness of, the competence and involvement in, as well as the perceived difficulty of ESL writing activities. Big differences were found in several of the categories but in most cases these differences were not statistically significant. Those differences that were found to be statistically significant (p<0.05) are subsequently outlined.

The only writing activity where chi-square results indicated a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their perception was on the writing of diaries. Many more girls (32.3%) than boys (6.7%) considered the writing of diaries as very enjoyable (p<0.05).
Table 4.17: Gender by level of enjoyment in keeping diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of enjoyment in keeping diaries</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Very much</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>32.3%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286                                df= 4                  p= 0.000

4.11.2 Gender and Usefulness in writing diaries

Both boys and girls were also asked to indicate how useful they considered the ESL writing activities. Most chi-square results did not yield statistically significant differences between boys and girls. However, similar to the results concerning enjoyment, many more girls (37.7%) than boys (19.3%) considered the writing of diaries as being very useful (p<0.05).

Table 4.18: Gender by level of usefulness in writing diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of usefulness in writing diaries</th>
<th>Not at all</th>
<th>A little bit</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Useful</th>
<th>Very useful</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>37.7%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286                                df=5                  p=0.001
4.11.3 Gender and Voluntary Writing

To determine the relationship between gender and level of how often learners engaged in ESL writing activities on their own, chi-square tests were also carried out. Chi-square results indicated a statistically significant difference in how often boys and girls wrote diaries. Many more girls (31.1%) than boys (11.8%) wrote diaries on their own without being told to do so by the teacher (p<0.05).

Table 4.19: Gender by how often diaries are written voluntarily

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286  df = 5  p=0.000

4.11.4 Gender and Difficulty in Writing Diaries

Furthermore chi-square analyses were done to determine if sex differences existed with regard to the learners’ perceived difficulties in writing ESL activities. The only test that yielded a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their perception of the difficulties of writing activities was once again in the writing of diaries. Many more girls (65.3%) than boys (37.8%) considered the writing of diaries as easy or very easy (p<0.05).
Table 4.20: Gender and level of difficulties in writing diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286  df =4    p=0.000

4.11.5 Gender and Competence in Writing Diaries

All the results showed that girls indicated higher percentages of perceived competence as compared to boys but these differences were in most of the cases not statistically significant. However, there was a statistically significant difference between boys and girls in their perception of their competence in writing diaries. Many more girls (27.5%) than boys (13.4%) considered themselves as having very high competence in writing diaries (p<0.05).

Table 4.21: Gender and level of competence in writing diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Very low compete</th>
<th>Low compete</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>High compete</th>
<th>Very high compete</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286  df= 5    p=0.001

Finally, chi-square analyses were done to determine differences between gender and the level of teacher support ESL learners get from their teachers in writing ESL activities. The chi-square
results showed that there was no statistically significant difference between girls and boys in their perception of support they received from their teachers in all the writing activities.

4.12 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESL WRITING AND THE SCHOOLS’ PERFORMANCE LEVEL

As was indicated previously, three schools were purposively selected to determine the relationship between the schools’ level of performance on the one hand, and learners’ perceptions regarding the difficulty of ESL writing activities as well as their perception of their competence in these activities. One would expect that in higher performing schools there would be more learners who perceived themselves as competent and who might find the writing activities easy. Several of the chi-square analyses done, based on the school’s performance level, yielded clear and statistically significant differences between the three schools. However, it was only in some of these cases that a clear pattern emerged with regard to school performance and the selected variables (perceived difficulty and perceived competence) in the writing of ESL activities.

4.12.1 Schools’ Performance Level Versus Difficulty in Writing Essays

There were more learners from average and lower performing schools (17.2% and 23.2% respectively) than from higher performing schools (6.1%) that perceived the writing of essays as either difficult or very difficult.
Table 4.22: School’s performance level versus difficulty in writing essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools performance</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>35.0%</td>
<td>49.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286          df=  8       p=0.000

Thus, with an increase in school performance there was a decrease in the number of learners that found the writing of essays difficult. This difference was statistically significant (p<0.05). However, it was also noted that a high number of learners in the low performing school (58.1%) thought that writing essays were easy.

4.12.2 Schools’ Performance Level Versus Difficulty in writing Newspaper Articles

When combining the categories difficult and very difficult, it was clear that more learners in lower (30.1%) and average (37.9%) performing schools found the writing of newspaper articles difficult and very difficult, while only a few from the higher performing school (17.4%) found these activities to be difficult. The difference was found to be statistically significant.
Table 4.23: Schools’ performance level versus difficulty in writing newspaper articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Performance</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>35.7%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286                 df= 10                p=0.017

Categories ‘easy’ and ‘very easy’ were also combined and expectedly more learners (35.7%) from the high performing school indicated that the writing of newspaper articles was easy or very easy as compared to (31.2%) of those in the average performing school and (24.2%) of learners in the low performing school. These results indicated that with an increase in school performance there was an increase in the number of learners that found the writing of newspaper articles as easy and very easy.

4.12.3 Schools’ Performance Level versus Difficulty in Writing Poems

It was clear that with an increase in the performance level of schools there was an increase in the number of learners that found the writing of poems difficult. That is, more learners (28.6%) in higher performing school than learners in average (25.2%) and lower performing school (23.7%) perceived the writing of poems as either difficult or very difficult. This result is contrary to what would be expected, but the difference was found to be statistically significant (p<0.05).
Table 4.24: School’s performance level versus difficulty in writing poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Difficulty in Writing Poems</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schools Performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>53.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286                              df= 8                                 p=0.043

4.12.4 Schools’ Performance Versus Difficulty in Writing Diaries

Expectedly, for writing diaries, the results showed that there were more learners from the lower performing school (28%) and the average performing school (27.3%) than from the high performing school (12.2%) that perceived the writing of diaries as either difficult or very difficult. Thus, with an increase in school performance there was a decrease in the number of learners that found the writing of diaries difficult. This difference was statistically significant (p<0.05).
Table 4.2: Schools’ Performance Level versus difficulty in writing diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools performance</th>
<th>Very difficult</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>Easy</th>
<th>Very easy</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>51.7%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286               df= 8       p=0.002

For this same writing activity, the categories ‘easy’ and ‘very easy’ were also combined. As expected more learners (67.3%) from the high performing school indicated that the writing of diaries was easy as compared to (48.4%) of learners in the average performing school and (45.1%) of learners in low the performing school.

Similarly the relationship between the three schools’ level of performance and learners’ perception of their competence in the ESL writing activities were compared. Several of the chi-square analyses yielded clear and statistically significant differences between the three schools. However, it was only in some of these cases that a clear pattern emerged, with regard to school performance and the perceived competence in the writing of ESL activities.
4.12.5 Schools’ performance level versus competence in writing essays

Table 4.26: Schools’ level of performance versus competence in writing essays

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Competence in Writing Essays</th>
<th>Very low compete</th>
<th>Low compete</th>
<th>Somewhat compete</th>
<th>High compete</th>
<th>Very high compete</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>37.4%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286 df=10 p=0.000

More learners in the high performing school (59.2%) indicated that they have high and very high competence in writing essays as opposed to those learners from the average (27.4%) and the low performing schools (52.7%). When combining the categories ‘low’ and ‘very low’ on the same writing activity, the results also indicated that only (4.1%) of learners in the high performing school had low competence in writing essays compared to 21.1% and 19.4% from low and average schools respectively. The results were statistically significant (p<0.05).
4.12.6 Schools’ Performance level versus perceived Competence in Writing Newspaper Articles

Table 4.27: Schools’ Performance level versus perceived competence in writing newspaper articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of schools</th>
<th>Very low compete</th>
<th>Low compete</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>High compete</th>
<th>Very high compete</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>8.6%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>44.2%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286 df=12 p=0.004

The results from this chi-square analyses indicated that more learners from the higher performing school perceived themselves as having high competence in writing newspaper articles (34.7%) compared to those from the average performing school (20%) and the lower performing school (30.1%). Similarly there were substantially fewer learners from the higher performing school that felt they had low or very low competence in the writing of newspaper articles than was the case with low and average performing schools. This difference was found to be statistically significant (p<0.05).

4.12.7 Schools’ Performance level versus perceived Competence in Writing Summaries

When combining the categories ‘high competence’ and ‘very high competence’ in writing summaries, it was clear that with an increase in the performance level of schools there was an increase in the number of learners that found themselves competent in the writing of summaries.
### Table 4.28: Schools’ performance level versus perceived competence in writing summaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of competence in writing summaries</th>
<th>Very low comp</th>
<th>Low comp</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>High compet</th>
<th>Very high compet</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286 df=10 p=0.020

That means, more learners (53.1%) in the high performing school than learners in the average (50.5%) and the lower performing school (48%) perceived themselves to be highly or very highly competent in writing summaries. This difference was found to be statistically significant (p<0.05).

#### 4.12.8 Schools’ Performance level versus perceived Competence in Writing Poems

Categories ‘high’ and ‘very high’ competence were combined and from this combination it was clear that the results were the opposite of what was expected since more learners in the average performing school (47.4%) and in the low performing school (44.1%) than in the higher performing school (33.6%) perceived themselves as having high competence in the writing of poems. There was thus a decrease in the number of learners who perceived themselves as having
high competence in writing poems with an increase in school performance. This difference was found to be statistically significant (p<0.05).

Table 4.29: Schools’ performance level versus perceived competence in writing poems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School performance</th>
<th>Very low compete</th>
<th>Low compete</th>
<th>Some what compete</th>
<th>High compete</th>
<th>Very high compete</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>38.8%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>31.5%</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286       df=10       p=0.017

4.12.9 Schools’ Performance level versus perceived Competence in Writing Diaries

More learners in the high performing school (55.1%) as compared to 31.6% in the average and 45.2% in the low performing school, perceived themselves to be highly competent in the writing of diaries. The results showed that there was an increase in the number of learners who perceived themselves as having high competence in writing diaries with an increase in school performance. The difference was found to be statistically significant (p< 0.05).
Table 4.30: Schools’ performance level versus perceived competence in writing diaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School performance</th>
<th>Very low compete</th>
<th>Low compete</th>
<th>Some what</th>
<th>High compete</th>
<th>Very high compete</th>
<th>Missing</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N=286  df=10  p=0.004

4.13 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the findings of this study. The biographical information of ESL learners and teachers are discussed. The perceptions of learners on the enjoyment and usefulness of ESL writing activities were also discussed. The chapter also discussed the perceived level of usefulness of writing activities; learners’ perceived competencies and involvement in writing activities; the learners’ perceived difficulties with regard to writing activities were also outlined, as well as their voluntary involvement in writing activities. The support learners received from their ESL teachers and some suggestions by ESL learners on how their ESL teachers could assist them in their learning of ESL writing activities were also discussed. The chapter also discussed the teachers’ perceptions of the importance and enjoyment of teaching of ESL writing activities, as well as their perceived competencies with regard to the teaching of ESL writing activities. The support ESL teachers received from the Ministry of Education were also discussed. The last part
of this chapter discussed the research results based on chi-square analyses to determine if there were any statistical significant differences in the responses of participants based on sex and level of the performance of schools. The next chapter will be a discussion and interpretation of the research results.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION
This chapter discusses and interprets the results of the study as they relate to the research questions. It also summarises the results and the findings of the entire study and make recommendations from this study.

5.2 LEARNERS’ PERCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO ESL WRITING ACTIVITIES

This part of the study attempted to explore the perceptions of learners regarding the writing activities they are expected to do in Grade 11. In an attempt to answer the first objective of the study learners were asked how much they enjoyed doing each of the writing activities as well as how useful they considered each activity at the present time in their lives and in future.

5.2.1 Learners’ Perceptions on the Enjoyment and Usefulness of ESL Writing Activities

The views and attitudes of learners regarding their perceived level of enjoyment and perceived usefulness of ESL writing activities were explored. In this study it was found that learners had both negative and positive attitudes towards ESL writing activities. The literature highlights the importance of a positive attitude towards writing activities, for example, Brown (2006) stresses that the attitude learners have towards language writing will have either a positive or a negative influence on their desire and hence, their ability, to achieve proficiency in the language. Brown also added that, having a positive attitude towards language writing is an important contributor to the success of language learning, since a positive attitude brings greater success in terms of global language proficiency and competence in skills such as listening, speaking, reading and
writing. Choy (2002) further adds that a positive attitude may help learners maintain their language skills after classroom instruction is over. The results of the ESL learners’ perceived level of enjoyment of writing activities showed that there were writing activities that learners viewed as unpopular or that they disliked, as well as some that were viewed as popular or liked. When one looks at the average responses from the findings indicated in Table 4.5, it appears that a slightly higher percentage (50%) of learners disliked the writing activities, compared to 47% who indicated that they liked the writing activities. These findings are in agreement with the views of Witte (2007) who stresses that children show little interest in classroom writing activities and assignments. It could be generalized from the findings of this study that about 50% of Grade 11 learners in Windhoek do not enjoy writing activities and have negative attitudes towards them. Yet it is important that learners should have positive attitudes towards writing because researchers such as Cobanoglu (2006) and Atkinson (2003) posit that students’ positive attitude towards writing motivates them and improves their skills. Similarly Brown (2006) argues that having a positive attitude brings greater success in terms of language proficiency and competence in language skills, including writing. Cambira (2010) supports the idea that children’s enjoyment of, and value that they place on an activity are important components of achievement motivation. He further asserts that learners who enjoy a task and find it motivating or interesting are likely to choose to participate in that task and avoid tasks which they do not find motivating. The low performance of learners in their ESL writing activities might thus partly be due to their negative attitudes and low motivation.

The data gathered from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire and the focus group discussion indicated that learners enjoyed the writing activities because these activities were easy; they helped learners to enlarge their subject knowledge; they provided an opportunity to
use their own words; and activities promoted creativity and developed their imagination. On the other hand, reasons for not enjoying the writing activities were that they were difficult; required too much writing time; they were limited to one topic only; teachers did not look at their written work; and they obtained low grades for the activities written. These findings are in line with what was observed by Jones and Myhill (2007) who stated that essays posed a problem to learners because it required longer periods of time to write; expected them to write about unfamiliar topics as well as that the writing was perceived to be difficult.

Average results in Table 4.6 showed that more learners (56%) viewed the writing activities as useful compared to those who viewed them as not useful (35%). Reasons for perceiving these activities as useful, as given in the open-ended question of the questionnaire, were that the activities trained them for the future, improved their knowledge of writing, it prepared them for examinations and could provide job opportunities in future. It could be deduced from these views that the majority of learners in this study understood the importance of the writing activities to them in the present and in the future.

5.2.2 Perceived Competencies and Involvement of Learners in Writing Activities

Responses to items that elicited information regarding the learners’ perceived competence, perceived difficulty, and voluntary involvement with regard to writing activities were analysed. The perceived frequencies with regard to how much learners were voluntarily engaged in writing activities are indicated in Table 4.10. The majority of learners (54%) rarely or never engaged in writing activities on their own compared to few (27%) who often did so. It could be deduced from these findings that a high percentage of learners in this study lacked motivation to be engaged in writing activities. These findings are in line with Schunk’s (2009) argument that
motivated learners choose to work on tasks when they are not required to do so in their spare time, meaning learners engage in activities that facilitate learning. Schunk (2009) further argues the more frequent learners practise writing ESL activities, the more intrinsically motivated they become. However, as mentioned earlier, although 56% of learners in this study found the writing activities to be useful opposed to 35% who did not, and another 50% found activities to be enjoyable opposed to 47% who did not, only 27% reported that they engaged in these writing activities voluntarily. These findings cannot clearly support findings of Fulmer and Frijters (2011) who posit that learners participate willingly in activities they find interesting and important, and who argue that passive learners view English as just another subject to pass which has no necessity and practicality in their future. These findings indicate that learners in this study felt competent in the writing activities.

Having competence in activities should be a sign that learners have positive attitudes to writing activities, but this is not the case in the present findings, as seen from the previous section. Perceived frequencies with regard to how difficult learners perceived the writing activities are indicated in Table 4.8. Majority of learners (48%) found the writing activities to be very easy and easy as compared to few (21%) who found the writing activities very difficult and difficult. It could be deduced from these findings that a high percentage of learners in this study found the writing activities to be easy. These findings are contrary to what Trang (2009) argues. He says many students consider writing as the most difficult skill. Ackerman’s (2006) report furthermore states that up to 40% of students in high schools are not doing well in writing classes. Learners’ perception that the writing activities were easy and that they had high competence in these activities were not expected, because of their examination results of 2008, 2009 and 2010 where more learners achieved lower symbols of D to G compared to those who achieved A+ to C.
Learners’ reported performance in ESL (see Table 4.4) also indicates that more learners (65.5%) scored below 60% compared to learners who obtained scores of 60% and above (34.5%).

In the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, ESL respondents stated the reasons for their perceived difficulty in writing activities.

Some of these perceived difficulties were; difficulty to introduce an essay, spelling of words, losing ideas, difficulties to choose words and the correct use of tenses. This view is in support of Grabe and Kaplans’ (2000) view that the most common problem in writing is the writer’s difficulty in beginning to compose. This phenomenon is referred to as ‘Block’. In addition to this, Grabe and Kaplan (2000) and Myles (2002) state that using tenses correctly has always been a serious difficulty in writing for most second language learners. They further argue that choosing the right word to fit the context is also difficult, especially when students have low English language skills. Regarding learners’ perceived competence the average responses of learners (see Table 4.7) show that the majority of learners (44%) perceived themselves as having high competence while a small percentage (21%) perceived themselves as having low competence. When learners were asked to indicate their performance in ESL in 2010 first term examination results, responses showed that majority of them (64.5%) scored between 0-39, 40-59 and 50-59 percent. Few (32.8%) scored 60-69 and 70-100 percent (see Table 4.3). The average percent of learners obtaining A+ to D symbols in the lower, average and higher performing schools from 2008 to 2010 also indicated that there was a big difference between the performances of the three schools in English as a Second Language. It was also noticed that higher percentages of learners in all three schools obtained symbols below D (see Table 4.4).
5.2.3 Learner Support

The findings from the average responses of learners on their perceptions with regard to the support they received from their ESL teachers in Table 4.11 indicate that a large number of learners (48.3%) received much support from their teachers as compared to a smaller percentage (29.0%) who said they only received little support. Some suggestions were given by these learners on how their teachers could support their ESL writing. Learners suggested their teachers (Table 4.12) could motivate learners, give more writing activities and improve their teaching methods. These findings support Kellogg (2008) who states that since writing is learnt through practice, teachers should provide learning opportunities in a positive and cooperative learning environment for students to express themselves. Schunk (2009) argues that highly motivated learners establish classroom environments that build self-efficacy which improves writing performance. He also adds that motivated learners put in greater effort rather than quit when they encounter difficult material.

5.3 ESL TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS WITH REGARD TO ESL WRITING ACTIVITIES

Teachers were asked in the questionnaire how much they enjoyed the writing activities as well as how important they perceived each ESL writing activity they thought to be. The results from the average responses on the ESL teachers’ perceived level of enjoyment indicate that the majority of teachers (74%) enjoyed writing activities much compared to a few (14.0%) who enjoyed the writing activities somewhat or only a little.

Findings from an open-ended question in the teacher questionnaire indicated reasons why ESL teachers liked and disliked the ESL writing activities they taught. Teachers liked teaching ESL writing activities since such activities motivated learners and allowed them to express their
views. This view supports Atkinson (2003) who posits that motivation has a positive effect on students’ performance in learning language skills. Teachers also indicated liking the writing activities because they were communicative and allowed learners to communicate through writing. This supports what Hymes (1972) referred to as the goal of language teaching which is “communicative competence.” Hymes further argues that effective communication refers to the learners’ ability to transmit information, ideas, thoughts or feelings through writing and their ability to receive these through listening or reading.

ESL teachers in the study also said they did not enjoy the ESL writing activities due to overcrowded classrooms which meant too much marking. This finding supports Holmes (2004) who states that what students in writing classes need is enough practice in writing activities but to achieve this goal, individualized work is essential. The problem, according to Holmes, is that classes are often too overcrowded to do this. However, Pratt-Johnson (2008) argues that even when ESL classrooms are overcrowded, feedback should be provided to learners on their writing, since they must be taught to write effectively and not just correctly. He adds that the quality of feedback given to the learners might further advance their academic writing skills. In addition Jones and Myhill (2007) posit that teacher feedback might assist students in mentoring their own progress and identifying specific areas of improvement. To add to these findings, Kellogg (2008) urges the use of computers to provide feedback on students’ work as a tool to ease teachers’ marking load.

Responses to items that elicited information regarding the teachers’ perceived usefulness of writing activities were analyzed. The average responses of teachers as indicated in Table 4.14 show that the majority of teachers (94%) perceived their teaching of writing activities as useful, and only a few (6%) perceived their teaching as somewhat important. These findings show that
ESL teachers had positive attitudes in the teaching of ESL writing activities. These views support Ong and Zhang (2010) who argue that the level of commitment of an instructor depends on how competent he or she feels in writing. Further to this, the majority of ESL teachers in this study indicated that they perceived themselves to be competent and very competent in the writing activities (96%) compared to (4%) who perceived themselves as having some competence in teaching writing.

Findings from an open-ended question in the questionnaire indicated that teachers encountered difficulties in their teaching due to reasons such as; learners not being able to spell words, lack of learner motivation, and lack of teaching resources and overcrowding of classes. These findings on learner motivation support Gabrielatos (2002) who argues that teachers should motivate their learners to write more since highly motivated students would be more likely to manage their own learning and develop the requisite skills to become effective writers. The findings on learners not being able to spell words correctly are in line with Witte (2007) who states that the difficulties ESL writing students have are due to problems of spelling words correctly to fit their context especially when they have low English language skills. The majority of ESL teachers (58.0%) indicated being given no support by the Ministry of Education as compared to 39.0% who said they were given little support in their ESL teaching of writing activities.

Findings from the open-ended question in the teachers’ questionnaire indicated that teachers suggested training in teaching all levels of ESL writing. These findings are in support of Holmes (2004) who argues that without proper ESL/EFL teacher training, teachers might not be able to assist students to overcome writing difficulties.
Another open-ended question asked teachers about the strategies they used to cope with the high demands of ESL teaching, and specifically writing in English. Even though some teachers said they did not have any strategies, others said they only gave one formative writing activity per term, made use of peer assessment and used internet resources. Contrary to the teacher strategy of giving one formative writing activity per term, Braine (2004) argues that practising writing daily might help improve learners’ writing skills as it would train them to put their thoughts into words. He further said writing daily might also help ESL learners learn new vocabulary which would improve their writing skills.

5.4 RESEARCH RESULTS BASED ON CHI-SQUARE ANALYSES

Chi-square analyses were done to compare the perceptions of boys and girls with regard to writing activities, as well as compare learners’ perceived competence and the difficulties they experience in writing activities by the three schools. The statistically significant difference that was found between boys and girls was for the writing of diaries (p<0.01 in all cases). The findings clearly indicated that girls, more than boys, enjoyed writing diaries and also found it more useful and easy to write than boys did. In addition to this, girls felt more competent and engaged more often voluntarily in the writing of diaries than boys did. These findings give some support to Visshcer and Dreary (2010) who found evidence to suggest that boys in comparison to girls in the UK and America underperformed in written language tasks. Even though all young writers are likely to find it difficult to consider their audience, Kellogg (2008) states that females develop meta-cognitive skills at an earlier age which may impact on their written language skills. Walker (2005) also argues that females are more advanced than males in false belief tasks; these are tasks in which the writer makes up a story to write about.
Several chi-square analyses yielded clear and statistically significant differences between the three schools. However, it was only in some of these cases that a clear pattern emerged with regard to school performance and the perceived competence in ESL writing activities. It is clearly indicated in Tables 4.26 to 4.30 that there were statistically significant differences in the schools’ performance levels of perceived competence in writing activities (p<0.05 in all cases). Findings clearly indicated that more learners in the high performing school perceived themselves as competent in the writing of essays, newspaper articles, summaries and diaries compared to those from the average and low performing schools. This supports Olivas and Li (2006) who argue that lack of competence of ESL students in academic writing affects their academic performance. A further argument by Hidi and Boscolo (2006) states that, a student’s level of concern with writing depends on how competent he or she feels in performing the task.

Unexpected results were indicated in the writing of poems where more learners from the lower performing school perceived themselves as having very high competence in performing these activities compared to fewer in the average and high performing schools. This may be because learners in the higher performing schools might be more aware of the complexities involved in the writing of a good poem.

Similarly results reflected in Tables 4.22, 4.23, 4.24 and 4.25 revealed that there were statistically significant differences in schools’ performance levels of perceived difficulty in some of the writing activities. The findings clearly indicated that more learners in the high performing school perceived the writing of essays, newspaper articles and diaries as easy to write compared to the average and the lower performing schools. For the writing of poems, more learners in the higher performing school (28.6%) compared to 25.2% in the average performing and 23.7% in
the lower performing school perceived the writing of poems as difficult. This result is contrary to what would be expected, but the difference was found to be statistically significant (p<0.05).

5.5 OTHER TRENDS REVEALED BY THE RESEARCH RESULTS

Apart from the trends discussed above, a number of other interesting trends were observed from the data. For example, it was noted that although teachers enjoyed the teaching of diaries, learners did not find the writing of diaries enjoyable and useful while on the other hand they found themselves to be competent and very competent in writing this activity. Furthermore, it also became clear that learners liked writing poems which the teachers also enjoyed teaching. It was interesting to observe that even though learners liked writing poems they found it not useful. They perceived themselves to have high and very high competence in writing poems. These discrepancies are difficult to explain and further research into these issues may shed some light on this.

5.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Since the examination results of learners indicated poor performance, teachers could improve on these results by giving more writing activities to learners because the more learners write, the more they would learn and master the skill of writing.

2. Pieces of writing should be marked thoroughly by the teacher, and learners should be clear on why they have obtained a specific mark and what their mistakes are.

3. Learners should be encouraged to make use of books in libraries to read a lot in order to become proficient in vocabulary and spelling. Reading more could improve the learners’ levels of reading and they would become familiar with more English words. Once learners
are well equipped with vocabulary, they could become good writers which would make their writing appropriate.

4. Since teachers seem to value the ESL writing activities as very important in the child’s life, they must be motivated to enjoy the teaching of such activities by the Ministry of Education through more in-service training on the teaching of ESL writing activities.

5. Both teachers and learners should be encouraged to make better use of Web-based instruction and learning. This will ease teachers’ marking and will give more opportunities to learners to practice their writing skills.

6. To make learners like the writing activities, teachers should give relevant and interesting topics for essays.

7. In order to influence learners to develop positive attitudes towards writing, teachers should encourage learners to do more writing activities on their own through writing competitions. Once learners know they will get a reward from their writing they will be more motivated to write to achieve the rewards.

8. To motivate learners’ writing, teachers should adjust their teaching methods to suit the learners’ interests.

5.7 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the Grade 11 learners and teachers’ perceptions of ESL writing activities in selected schools in Windhoek. The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies in order to gather data that would appropriately answer its questions. Both the literature review, as well as an empirical investigation, was conducted to thoroughly investigate the research problem. From this study it is clear that learners should be given opportunities to read a wide range of materials and to practice writing in different styles.
They should be encouraged to understand that reading, writing, language usage and literature are accomplished and assessed together in practice.

This study set out to explore the perceptions of ESL learners and teachers regarding the ESL writing activities in the selected schools in the Khomas region. There is a need to consider the learners’ perceptions of ESL writing activities in order to assist various stakeholders such as teachers, civil society and parents in finding solutions to the improvement of performance in English writing. Based on the findings from this study, it can be argued that ESL learners received much support from their ESL teachers. On the other hand, teachers indicated not receiving much support from the Ministry of Education on how to teach the ESL writing activities to learners.

Other factors that need to be addressed concerning the perceptions of ESL learners and teachers on ESL writing activities in Khomas region which emanated from findings of this study were: giving learners more practical exercises; focusing on difficult topics; improving the way of teaching; giving more reading and writing activities to learners; extra lessons in writing; giving formative activities; peer assessment and marking of writing activities in overcrowded classrooms.
REFERENCES


