

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, findings are presented based on an analysis of all the data collected through the questionnaires, structured interviews and sample compositions. The findings are presented in two parts. The first part of the findings provides background information on both the student and teacher respondents and discusses in relation to their perceptions of the importance of writing, students' proficiency in writing, teachers' perception of their students' writing competency and students' reading habits. The second part of the findings, will be presented to answer the research questions and will be discussed in relation to similar findings from other studies.

4.1 Part 1 Background Information of Research Sample

A general profile of the subjects, that is, the students and teachers involved in this study is first given. The information is obtained from Part I of both the students' and teachers' questionnaires.

4.1.1 Students

This includes the students’ gender, their performance in the PMR examination, their perception toward the importance of English and their proficiency of the four English Language skills, the languages they use for communication and their reading habit, and the kinds of reading materials they enjoy reading.

Table 4.1 (a) Background Information of Student Sample

Sex	Male		Female
	31		19
Grade obtained for	A	B	C
English in PMR	15	33	2
Plan to further studies	Yes		No
	40		10
Importance of English	Very Important	Important	Not Important
	40	10	-

The 50 students involved in this study were all from Form Four. There were 31 male and 19 female respondents. All the students passed their PMR English examination. Out of the 50 respondents, 15 (30%) obtained grade A, 33 (66%) obtained Grade B and 2 (4%) obtained grade C. The grades obtained by the students in the PMR examination are quite

encouraging. 40 (80%) of the respondents plan to further their studies and they had listed English as very important to them. The remaining 10 (20%) listed English as important. Overall, it is encouraging to note that all the respondents realized and are aware of the importance of English. This fact can also be substantiated from the Teachers' Questionnaire where all the 10 teacher respondents perceived that their students are motivated to learn English.

Table 4.1 (b) Importance of the 4 English Language Skills

Skills	Very Important	Important	Not Important
Listening	33	17	-
Speaking	41	9	-
Reading	13	35	2
Writing	17	32	1

However, from the students' questionnaire, only 17 (34%) rated writing skills as very important as compared to 41 (82%) of the students who rated the speaking skills as very important. From here, it can be concluded that, these students perceived that knowing how to speak English is more useful in communication than in writing.

Table 4.1 (c) Proficiency in the 4 English Language Skills

Skills	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Listening	-	12	27	11
Speaking	-	4	17	29
Reading	-	10	29	11
Writing	-	-	3	47

As to their proficiency in the four language skills in English (refer to Table 4.1 (c)), it is reviewed that 47 out of the 50 (94%) student respondents rated writing as the weakest of

the 4 language skills. This can also be concurred from the 10 teacher respondents (refer to Table 4.1.2 (b)). None of the 10 teachers rated their students' writing proficiency as very good. Only 1 teacher respondent rated her students as having good writing skills. 5 of the teacher respondents rated their students as having poor writing skills and only 3 of them rated their students' writing proficiency and competence as fair.

Table 4.1 (d) Language Use for Communication

Language	Home	School	Public Places
Chinese (include dialects)	50	50	50
Malay	-	18	44
English	9	18	12

Another fact is that students hardly use English to communicate either at home, in school or in public places (refer to Table 4.1 (d)). 44 (88%) student respondents use Bahasa Malaysia in public places as compared to only 12 (24%) who use English. This accounted for their lack of exposure and the limited usage of the English Language outside school and the home. This in turn may influence students who feel that it is not important to use English at all outside the classroom and the home.

Table 4.1 (e) Frequency in Reading in English

Frequency	Number of Students
I read whenever I am free	4
I usually do not have time to read	3
I seldom read	25
I read only when my teacher asks me to read	16
I don't like to read in English at all	2

**Table 4.1 (f) Most Enjoyed Reading Materials
(rank in order of preference)**

Newspaper	2
Magazines	3
Novels	6
Short stories	5
Comics	1
Textbooks	7
Others (please specify)	4 (from Internet)

When questioned on their reading frequency from the questionnaire (refer to Table 4.1.(e)), it is reviewed that the majority of the students do not read enough or rather do not have the habit of reading. Out of the 50 student respondents, 25 (50%) of them responded that they seldom read, 16 (32%) responded that they only read when instructed by their teachers and there are 2 (10%) who responded that they do not read at all in English. From the teachers' questionnaire, 7 teachers responded that their students do not enjoy reading in English and even if they read, their reading materials consist mainly comics or cartoons, newspaper and magazines rather than literary texts. And it is through reading of substantial and contextualized texts (Lazar 1993, Collie 1994) cited by Sta Maria (1999) that students gain familiarity with the many features of written language such as the formation and function of sentences, the variety of possible structures and the

different ways of connecting ideas. And it is also through literary texts where learners are exposed to abundant examples of the subtle and complex use of grammar and word choice (Sta Maria, 1999). Morais (2000) also reviewed that ESL students are often unable to generate enough worthwhile ideas in their writing because they do not read enough. According to a report at an international conference on literacy by Ambigapathy and Ab.Latiff (1997) cited by Morais (2000:21) " 79% of students spent less than an hour a week reading in English for pleasure. They described the findings as disturbing in view of the fact that the students in the sample were drawn from an elite group that might have been expected to serve as a model for others."

The lack of reading is one of the most important factors that contributed to their problems in composition writing. It is widely believed by many teachers that there is a correlation between reading and writing. The benefits of extensive reading for improving writing have been made explicit by many researchers in their studies. According to Taylor (1981) cited by Goh (1986 : 28) " the value of reading lies not only in the content but also from the exposure it gives students to a variety of culturally appropriate rhetorical and stylistic options, organizational patterns and patterns of logic and support. Extensive reading also foster vocabulary growth and the acquisition of syntax, all in context."

Reading researchers such as Frank Smith (1981) Collie (1987) Lazar (1993) have also underscored the importance of increased reading for improving writing ability. From his first study , Krashen (1984) found a correlation between reading input and the quality of writing. Krashen discovered that avid and voracious readers made better writers. In an

extensive longitudinal study of the relationship between reading achievement and writing ability among grade 6 students, Loban (1963) cited by Goh (1986 : 27) found a strong co-relationship between the reading scores of the students and the ratings of their compositions. He concluded that " those who read also write well; those who read poorly also write poorly." Research findings on the correlationship between reading and writing will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

Table 4.1 (g) responses on other writing activities

Writing Activities	No. of Students
<i>Letters to friends / relatives</i>	16
<i>Messages</i>	23
<i>Report</i>	-
<i>Articles</i>	-
<i>Others (please specify)</i>	16

From item 9 of Part I of the student questionnaire, 23 (46%) of the students responded that besides writing compositions in class, they write messages to friends via Internet and 16 (32%) of them responded that they write friendly letters to friends in English. This shows that students have very little practice in writing besides writing class compositions. However, from the response from the teachers' questionnaire, most of the teachers encouraged their students to write friendly letters, journals and diaries.

Table 4.1 (h) responses from other questions

	Yes	No
Is the number of composition given enough ?	15	35
Is 2 periods enough for writing your composition?	10	40
Are you allowed to take home to write your class Composition ?	15	35

A great majority (refer to Table 4.1 (h)) , 35 (75%) of the student respondents for the questionnaire responded that they felt that the number of compositions given per year is not enough. They were also not allowed to take home their composition to write and they felt the 2 periods allotted to composition writing in class is not enough. This accounted for students' either lack of opportunity to practise or acquire the skills to rewrite and revise their drafts before handing in for the teacher to evaluate their writing. Hedge (1989) commented on the importance of giving time to the students to work through the stages of planning, drafting and revision to slowly develop students' the confidence they need to write a more effective composition.

4.1.2 Teachers

Table 4.1.2 (a) Background information of Teachers' Sample

Sex	Male 1		Female 9	
Years of experience in teaching English	0-5 yrs 1	6-10 yrs 1	11-15 yrs 6	16 2
Highest Academic Qualification	Graduate 8		Non-Graduate 1	Post Graduate 1
Professional Teaching Qualification (B.Ed, Dip.Ed, Cert.in Edu)	5			
Trained TESL Teacher	2			
Attended course in Teaching of Writing	2			
Knowledge of Process Writing	2			
Teach Process Writing in class	1			

Table 4.1.2 (b) Students Proficiency in each of the 4 English Language Skills (as perceived by teachers)

Skills	Very Good	Good	Fair	Poor
Listening	4	4	2	-
Speaking	1	3	5	1
Reading	2	4	2	2
Writing	-	1	3	6

Out of the 10 teacher respondents, 8 are teaching the Form Four classes and 2 are teaching the Form Fives. The teacher sample comprises 1 male and 9 females. Table 4.1.2 (a) and 4.1.2 (b) show information related to teachers' sex , experience , academic

and professional qualifications and their perception of their students' language proficiency.

In part I of the teachers' questionnaire, teachers were requested to provide some personal data which may have influenced their methodology and perhaps their attitude towards teaching composition. The data included years of teaching experience, their academic and professional qualification, in-service course in teaching writing, knowledge and teaching of process writing in class.

A summary of the data (refer to Table 4.1.2 (a)) revealed that more than half i.e 6 of the teacher respondents have more than 10 years of teaching experience, only 1 with less than 2 years. 8 of them have at least a basic degree while only 1 teacher has HSC qualification. In addition to their basic diploma or teaching qualification, only 2 out of the 5 have additional professional qualifications such as TESL certificates or diploma. This data suggests that teachers in this school are in general, qualified and experienced. However, a point to note, it does not necessarily mean that they are professionally trained to teach English as only 2 of them are TESL trained and the majority of the teachers, in this school are non-English optionists. As reviewed in Lim (1987) on ESL teachers in Chinese Independent schools, it was discovered from interviews with school administrators and teachers, that there existed different categories of teachers with very different levels of language proficiency. It was found that teachers had varied training in the teaching of ESL in these Chinese schools. It had been found too that a majority of teachers had not attended any form of teacher training before beginning their profession

at these schools nor had they attended courses in teaching writing. It should be pointed out that a similar situation exists in this school. From the questionnaire, it was also revealed that out of the 10 teacher respondents, 2 of them have attended a course in teaching of writing and have found the course useful. 2 of the teachers responded that they have knowledge of Process Writing and only one has reported using the approach in her composition classes.

4.2 Part 2 Research Questions

This section described how the data derived from Part II of both the students' and teachers' questionnaires, structured interviews and samples of compositions were analysed through triangulation. Triangulation of the data is essential to arrive at a more complete understanding of the problems faced by students and teachers in writing and teaching composition writing respectively.

At this juncture, a point to note is that, the problems identified and investigated are not water-tight and in separate categories as there were frequent overlapping of the data collected under the three research questions. The researcher attempted to triangulate the findings whereby the tabulated responses in frequency counts from the students' and teachers' questionnaire were discussed in conjunction with the questions from the interview and the observations made of the writing samples produced by the students.

The analysis and findings would enable the researcher to answer the following research questions.

- 4.2.1 What are the content-based problems in composition writing?
- 4.2.2 What are the process-based problems in composition writing?
- 4.2.3 What are the language-based problems in composition writing?

4.2.1 Research Question 1 : What are the content-based problems ?

From the responses given by the students and the teachers in the questionnaire, structured interview and samples of compositions, they revealed the following:

Starting from a general question (refer Appendix C): Do you enjoy writing composition? and Why?

2 of the interviewees responded that they do not enjoy writing composition giving the reasons that they have no confidence in writing in English and find great difficulties in expressing their ideas and facts in English. There are two possible reasons for this.

Student A, stated the frustration she felt in having to express herself in English due to her poor command of the English Language. Besides, her scores for composition were often very low and discouraging. Student B. disliked writing even in his own mother tongue – Chinese, since primary school. He preferred reading to writing. To him reading is less

strenuous because he does not need to spend time thinking what to write and how to put his thoughts on paper.

The other 3 interviewees, students C, D, and E were more positive stating that it depended on their moods, the composition topic given by the teacher, whether their teacher provided them with sufficient content input for the composition topic and the way the teacher taught composition in class. The fact that they depended on the teacher to give them the points and ideas to write can be confirmed from the responses from the student respondents to the first question in section B of the questionnaire on their perception of the teacher being of great help to them in learning how to write good composition. And surprisingly, 27(54%) of the student respondents from the questionnaire survey responded that their teacher explained, discussed and told them what to write *sometimes* only. Most of the time, students were left alone to struggle through their writing.

Table 4. 2 (a) (i)Composition topics that Interest Students Most
(N = 50)

Narrative	47
Descriptive	23
Argumentative	14
Factual	25

Table 4.2 (a)(ii) Students' Responses from Item 3 to 6
Section A (Content)
(N = 50)

Item	Yes	Sometimes	No
2) My teacher can help me to learn how to write good composition	18	5	27
3) Do you find it easy to share and express your ideas in English during discussions?	25	19	6
4) Do you find difficulty in writing the introductory sentences in your composition because of lack of ideas?	28	9	13
5) Does your teacher explain, discuss or give you the necessary points before asking you to write?	18	27	5
6) Do you discuss your composition topic with your friends in class before writing ?	28	9	13

On the question of what types of composition topics interest them (refer Table 4.2.(a)(i)) 47 (94%) of the students responded in the questionnaire that the narrative mode interest them most, followed by, factual, descriptive and argumentative. Most of the students find writing argumentative composition difficult citing their inability to express their points, views and ideas coherently and convincingly in English.

When interviewed on the similar question, 3 student interviewees confirmed that writing narrative topics interest them most because they find narrating events or stories easier when compared to factual or argumentative topics. They commented that writing narrative topics is freer in the sense that they are not restricted by any form and they could write from their own experience. They could write longer compositions. With

factual topics, they must have the necessary facts that they often do not have because they do not read enough.

However, 2 student interviewees preferred writing factual topics stating that they could get better grades or higher marks for composition. Student C put it this way :

“ As long as the facts are there, I can write. Furthermore, I can translate the points or facts from Chinese. I also can get higher marks for my composition because my teacher will have to give me marks for my content even though my language is not so good. I have the facts and the teacher cannot fail me.”

This may well indicate that the student respondent is only aware of the importance of having the necessary content but not the skills of organization which are equally important. Morais (2000) lends support to this view. She notes that " a writer must have something to say (content) and he should also know how to present his ideas at the discourse and sentence level. The latter involves the appropriate and accurate use of the code and the ability to organise ideas" (Morais 2000 : 4) In contrast, the 2 teacher interviewees remarked that students had more weakness in composing in the narrative mode. Teacher A commented: " I find my students make more language errors in narrative topics. Their compositions in the narrative mode tend to be long and there are a lot of repetitions of ideas."

The two teacher interviewees shared the same view that their students had problems in sequencing, expanding or elaborating their ideas or points. Besides, they find their

students having problems in developing a coherent paragraph owing to their inability to organize and arrange their ideas.

It is interesting to note how the students and teachers differ in their perceptions of the difficulties and problems they encounter in writing and teaching the different types of discourse respectively. For example, students feel having sufficient facts is enough for writing factual composition and are not aware that the ability to organize their ideas and facts and express them coherently and logically are equally important. As for the teachers, they feel that their students make more errors in narrative compositions due to their lack of skills in elaborating and expanding their ideas, organizing their ideas meaningfully and linguistic competence.

Table 4.2.2 (a) Teachers’ Responses for
Section A (Content)
(N=10)

Item	SA	A	U	SD	D
1) Students should be given guidance on writing the different types of composition(e.g. narrative, descriptive etc) in order to expose them to different genre and register in writing	8	2	-	-	-
2) Students should be given topics which they have first hand experience to write	5	4	-	-	1
3) Students should write the same topic so that there is a common basis for assessment and ease our problem in marking and grading	6	2	1	-	1
4) Students can write better if they are given the freedom to express their writing on topics chosen by themselves	5	2	1-	-	2
5) Students should be encouraged to do pre-writing activities such as free writing exercise, mind-mapping etc.	6	3	-	-	1
6) All composition lessons given in classroom should help students to meet examination requirement since they will eventually sit for exams	7	2	-	-	1

It was revealed that 8 out of the 10 teacher respondents in the questionnaire (refer to Table 4.2.2 (a)) strongly agreed that students should be given guidance on writing the different types of composition so as to expose them to the different genre and register in writing. The responses of the teachers' questionnaire in their questionnaire, revealed that teachers are very concerned about the necessity for preparing students for examination. This is evident from the 7 out of the 10 teachers who strongly agreed that all composition lessons given in class should help students to meet examination requirement and that students be given the same topic to write so that there is a common basis for assessment.

4.2.2 Research Question 2 - What are the process - based problems ?

Table 4.2 (b) Students' Responses for
Section B (Process)
(N =50)

Item	SA	A	U	SD	D
1) My teacher can help me to learn how to write good compositions	20	27	1	-	-
2) I know <i>who</i> I am supposed to write	2	10	20	7	10
3) I know <i>why</i> I am writing the composition	1	8	20	6	15
4) I often get stuck and run out of ideas while writing	10	15	12	10	3
4) I always edit my composition for errors before handing in for marking	5	9	10	13	13
6) I usually rewrite/redraft my composition before handing in for assessment	3	5	2	14	16

As defined by the researcher, the findings on this research question will be categorized into the following stages: Pre-writing, Writing and Re-writing

(i) Pre-writing Stage:

At this stage, the problems encountered by the students were mainly due to the lack of pre-writing activities in class before writing. When interviewed, 2 student interviewees commented that they hardly had any activities such as brainstorming, group discussion, mind-mapping, free-writing etc. And from the students' questionnaire (refer to Table 4.2(a) (ii) item 5 & 6), 30 (60%) students responded that they did not discuss the composition topics with friends and only sometimes with teachers before writing their composition. They also commented that their teacher usually 'spoon-fed' them by giving them the main points and ideas on the board and only discussed the points given very briefly. It can be concluded that students were thus not given the chance to have their thoughts stimulated. They lack the experience and practice of expressing and organizing their ideas and thoughts in oral or written form which in turn will affect their composition writing. Findings of Stallard (1974) Pianko (1979) Murray (1984) and Reid (1996) revealed that time spent on pre-writing instruction is more worthwhile than labouring on extensive evaluation. And to lend support to the importance of pre-writing activities, studies have shown that good students and good writers spend longer time in the initial planning stage to generate ideas and organize their thoughts (Hillock 1982)

From the responses from the questionnaire (refer to table 4.2 (b)), most of the students responded that they were not fully aware of the idea of *who* they were writing to (audience) and *why* they were writing (purpose). As commented by Hedge (1989 :9) "the process of writing involves not only composing but also communicating." Most of

the writing we do in life is written with a reader in mind. Knowing who the reader is and the purpose of writing, provide the writer with a context without which it is difficult to know exactly what or how to write. Without a context, it is indeed difficult to know what to put in and what to leave out, or how formal or informal to be. In other words, the selection of appropriate content and style depends on a sense of audience. Besides, when students understand the context, they are much more likely to write effectively. Furthermore, it is also at this stage that students explore possible content and planning outlines for their writing. However, a note of caution from Widdowson (1983), “ even when quite elaborate outlines are prepared, it must be bore in mind that good writers change their ideas as they write and reshape their plans at this stage.

Table 4.2.2 (b) Teachers' Responses for
Section B (Process)
(N = 10)

Rate the following statements	1	2	3	4
1) In order to write an effective well organized composition, students should have all their ideas clear in their mind and prepare and outline before starting to write	8	2	-	-
2) Teachers should start a composition lesson by eliciting relevant ideas about the topic from students	3	5	1	1
3) Teachers should give group activities or pre-writing activities in composition lesson before writing	8	2	-	-
4) Teachers should allow student to read one another's composition after they have completed their writing	6	2	1	1
5) Teachers should encourage their students to edit and correct one another's composition before passing up for assessment	3	3	2	2
6) Teachers should allow time for students to revise and rewrite their composition before passing up for marking	7	3	-	-
7) Teachers should comment on their students' composition besides pointing out their grammatical errors	6	2	1	1
8) Teachers should not hurry student to hand in their composition within a given time to meet exmination conditions	4	2	2	2
9) Every error on a student's composition should be corrected by the teacher	3	2	2	3

It is noted from the teacher respondents that they thought it is important that they should start their composition lesson by eliciting relevant ideas about the topic from their students and giving group activities in their composition class (refer to table 4.2.2 (b)). Their positive response reflected on the importance of discussion of composition topics with either friends or teacher before putting their thoughts on paper. But from interviews with the teacher and student interviewees, students do not get to discuss their composition topics in class. The teacher interviewee cited students' lack of communicative performance and linguistic competence. And, as commented by one of the student interviewees, their composition lesson ended with the teachers taking the easy way out of giving and spoon feeding them with the necessary points for their composition.

However, there appears to be a dichotomy between the students' and teachers' responses in the questionnaire and interview on pre-writing activities. There is a discrepancy in the findings between what the teacher perceived that they ought to do at this stage and their actual classroom practice. All the teacher respondents in the questionnaire responded that it was very important that they give group activities and elicit relevant ideas about the given topic from their students before writing. In actual practice, they did not conduct pre-writing activities as revealed by the student interviewees. The five student interviewees' negative responses to the researcher's question on whether their teacher conducted pre-writing activities, do not support the teachers' responses on this item in the questionnaire. A point to note here is that, the discrepancy in response could be due to the possibility that the teachers may be influenced by the notion of how they should teach from the questions posed in the questionnaire.

When questioned about pre-writing activities, the two teacher interviewees did remark that there was not enough time to carry out pre-writing activities. This was because students had to complete their composition within the two periods and hand in their composition at the end of the period purportedly to train students to write under examination conditions. It can be concluded that the time factor is a problem for both teachers and students in composition writing. Besides, one of the teacher interviewees remarked that it is difficult to conduct group discussion because students tend to use their mother tongue to discuss and they also make a lot of noise which will disturb the class next door. The school authorities may think that the teacher has poor class management.

In short, at this stage, pre-writing activities are important in helping students to think about what they want to say, to whom they want to say and in what form and how they should express what they want to say in writing. But needless to say, students are denied the opportunity and experience to work through this process of writing. No wonder, students find difficulties on not being able to write logically and they often get stuck because of lack of ideas on content.

(ii) Writing Stage

From the questionnaire (refer Table 4.2.(a) (ii) item 4), 40 (80%) students responded that they had difficulty in writing the introductory sentence. They also got stuck and ran out of ideas while writing. This problem could be attributed to the fact that they had not done

enough pre-writing activities to enable them to clarify their points or ideas, plan and organize their thoughts. This finding lends support to research findings that provided sufficient time has been spent on the pre-writing stage, it will proceed quickly and smoothly. It may take as little as one per cent of the time spent on a piece of writing. Nevertheless, it is a frightening stage for it is not only commitment but also through it, a writer discovers how much or how little is known about the topic (Hedge 1989).

In his research findings Goh (1989) found his pupils lack strategies to bring out their ideas from their subconscious mind and they would suffer from writing block which is common even among good writers.

(iii) Re-writing Stage

The main problem here lies with the insufficient time given to students to edit and to revise what they have written. On the part of the teachers, in theory, they are aware of the importance of encouraging students to edit, revise and rewrite their composition before handing in. But in reality, their students had not been given the time nor had they been trained to practise these skills. This finding is cross-validated from the responses from the students' questionnaire and interview. It was revealed that a majority of the students did not edit their compositions. Only 15 (30%) students agreed that they edit and revise their writing and only 2 of the student interviewees remarked that they asked their friends to help them spot their errors. When interviewed, one of the student interviewees revealed that he did not know how to go about editing or revising his composition / drafts. Three

of them were not aware of the importance of this skill nor were they competent or proficient in the language to edit and revise their own compositions. They needed the help from their teachers to point out their mistakes. Reid (1996) commented that teachers must prepare their students for revision not only by intervening in their writing but also by modeling successful revision processes , by demonstrating that revision is necessary for all writing and by using class time to teach students to revise.

As with the teacher interviewees, both of them remarked that, it was not their usual classroom practice to allow extra time for students to edit or revise because students are expected to hand in their composition at the end of the second period purportedly to train them to write under examination condition. Thus, it can be concluded that students have not cultivated the habit of revising and editing their draft/composition before handing in for teachers' assessment. Revising is an important part of composing. Skilled and professional writers engage in extensive revising (Stallard 1974, Emig 1971, Somers 1980).

Another problem connected with revision in composition writing is that of feedback. From the sample essays, they revealed that the teachers marked all types of errors and provided the correct form for students to do corrections. One of the teacher interviewees commented that she faced the dilemma of what she should focus on and how intentions and actual practice are often at odds because of the kind of writing produced by her students. Most of her students' compositions were littered with errors in language, sentence structure, expressions, vocabulary and lack coherence in their ideas. This can be

verified from the sample compositions. When marking she faced the problems of whether to focus on content or on form. Quoting her, "Is a focus on content more effective in helping students to write better essays or is a focus on grammar more beneficial?" From the sample compositions collected, from different modes - narrative, descriptive, argumentative and factual, it revealed that teachers only provide feedback in the form of locating and identifying students' surface errors. Teachers not only locate the errors and indicate the types of grammatical errors students made but also provide the correct form. They gave the correct form because according to them, students were not capable of self revising. One of the teacher interviewees remarked "students who are weak in writing are incapable of correcting their own errors and besides the school authorities and parents will think that teachers are abdicating their responsibility if they do not correct their students errors."

Another teacher interviewee remarked that it was quite a problem and task for her to respond to her students' composition with written comments due to the fact that she was teaching a large class size of about 55 students. Thus, she has to mark an average of 55 compositions per class besides other heavy workload as a language teacher in the school. Hence, it is not possible to make comment on each and every piece of students' work because it is very time-consuming. Besides, giving explicit comments to students' writing does not serve the purpose as most of the students do not bother to read the comments, according to her. Her remarks can be verified in the teachers' marking behaviour. There were no comments on students' organization of ideas, on their inability to elaborate, argue or substantiate their points and ideas.

This is contrary to what the students' think. As for the students, they welcome teachers' written comments. As one of the student interviewees put it, "I hope my teacher will write something after marking my composition. My teacher only corrects my grammar mistakes. I like my teacher to comment on my composition. I think it will be useful in helping me to do my corrections and I feel that she takes an interest in my work because she takes the trouble to read and comment."

The student's comment lends support to findings by Leki (1990) that teachers' comments help writers improve their writing because written comments seem more feasible and thorough than conferencing and it is the job of the teachers not only to evaluate students' writing but to be able to justify their evaluation (Leki 1990 : 58).

4.2.3 Research Question 3 What are the language-based problems ?

**Table 4.2 (c) Students' Responses for
Section C (Language)
(N=50)**

Item	Yes	No
1) Do you make a lot of grammatical errors in your composition?	45	5
2) Do you agree that teachers need to introduce a lot of grammar into composition lessons to help you write more effectively?	37	13
3) In order to write well, you should have a wide vocabulary	47	3
4) Does your teacher tell you to check for spelling, punctuation, paragraphing and grammar errors before you hand in for marking?	19	27
5) Do you find difficulties in structuring your sentences?	27	23
6) Do you know how to link your ideas with sentence connectors?	25	25
7) Do you use a dictionary whenever you write?	21	29

From the responses from the teachers' and students' questionnaire and cross-validated from the structured interview and samples of students' composition, the findings revealed that students were aware of their weakness in grammar. From the students' questionnaire (-refer to Table 4.2 (c)), it was revealed that 45 (90%) students responded that they made a lot of grammatical errors in their composition. 37 (74%) of the student respondents responded positively that teachers need to introduce a lot of grammar into composition lessons to help them write effective compositions. A majority of the students are weak in grammar despite heavy doses of grammar drills and exercises from their teachers. From personal experience as a teacher of English, the researcher observed that very often students can perform well in grammar drills but they have problems in applying the rules of grammar to their writing. The reason is that in their writing, they are faced with the need to perform a multitude of tasks at the same time: they have to apply the many rules of sentence structure, concord, verb form, tense/aspect, articles etc, each of which they practise separately. It is no wonder that when students are required to express themselves, when they have to pay attention to many different aspects of writing at the same time and when they have to simultaneously apply all the rules of grammar which they practise separately, they find the task daunting resulting in many grammar rules being forgotten. The students had problems with the correct usage of tenses, prepositions, adverbial particles, articles, concord and cohesive devices such as conjunctions, relative pronouns, etc. As discussed earlier, the grammatical errors made by the students can be verified and cross-validated from the sample compositions.

Students inability to use these grammatical items correctly could be attributed to the fact that being second or third language users in an environment where Chinese is the medium of instruction, they lack the opportunity to acquire the grammatical system of English in the naturalistic manner through hearing it used and through speaking it regularly. Hence, many students tend to write the way they speak. Besides, the English most of the students come in contact with outside school may be of a colloquial or non-standard form. Another factor is the teachers' approach to teaching grammar. Of course, the question of how grammar is taught in this school is a totally different question and this lies beyond the scope of this study.

Besides from one of the interviewees, and from the responses from the questionnaire, students either do not read widely in English or hardly read at all. As mentioned earlier, research findings reveal a correlation between reading and writing - better writers are better readers. Not only students hardly read but also they do not read critically. The inability to read a text critically is attributed to the fact that there is very little attention given to training critical reading in English in Chinese school. A corollary to this is that students are not able to read other's writing critically, they are similarly not able to read their own writing critically. They are not able to detect in their own writing how claims are made without due support, how connections that can be drawn for further development of ideas are not exploited, how arguments are not sustained or any other problems of thinking there may be in their own writing. Similarly, not being able to read for organization to see how the different parts of a text cohere, students are not able to

detect organizational problems in their own writing. Lack of critical assessment as reader results in lack of ability as writer. (Kwan –Terry, 1999:139)

From the students' compositions and interviews, many students also find difficulties in structuring their sentences. In relation to this, both teacher interviewees remarked that their students tend to translate from Chinese. Thus, resulting in 'funny and long' sentences that are mostly incomprehensible especially when translated from Chinese idiomatic expressions. Besides that, there is a lack of sentence variety in the students' compositions.

Making errors in spelling and punctuation is another shortcoming found in students' compositions. Their compositions are littered with spelling errors reflecting also their lackadaisical attitude towards using the dictionary to check the spelling. From the students' responses in the questionnaire (refer to Table 4.2 (c)), more than half of the respondents i.e. 29 out of 50 students (58%) do not have the habit of using their dictionary when writing composition.

Another problematic area is the students' lack of vocabulary. This is one of the reasons why they get stuck half way or change the original meaning of their intended expression when they try to replace with another inappropriate word. Their lack of vocabulary is also connected with their lack of reading. Besides that, it could be related to the traditional teaching methodology where new words are introduced either from an isolated and bilingual lists or from a bilingual dictionary (Deng and Liu 1989) cited by

Wong (1992). In either case, there is much room for improvement in the teaching and learning of vocabulary.

Field and Yip (1992) reported similar findings in their studies on vocabulary. They found that Chinese students showed a restricted choice of lexical items and half of the lexical items they use in their writing were mere repetitions of the same item. Their limited lexical repertoire represents a developmental problem faced by L2 learners. There are certain features that are characteristic of Chinese students for example, their misuse of certain words and collocations. The present study shows that the students had difficulty using the right word and right collocation (e.g. sharpen our appetite) and distinguishing 2 synonymous words (e.g. eat some flesh) Another is the interference of the mother tongue and general isomorphic translation from the first language (Yip 1992).

In short, the language problems encountered by students are of the following:

- (i) the incorrect usage of grammatical items such as prepositions, tenses, articles, concord, cohesive devices such as conjunctions, relative pronouns;
- (ii) a lackadaisical attitude towards using the dictionary to counter check spellings and for reference;
- (iii) punctuating incorrectly;
- (iv) the usage of wide and appropriate vocabulary with precision;
- (v) the ability of varying their sentences, the construction of grammatically correct sentences and the ability to engage and sustain the interest of the reader .

Table 4.2.2 (c) Teachers' Responses for
Section C (language)
(N = 10)

Rate the following in terms of importance	1	2	3	4
1) Getting the <i>grammar</i> right	9	1	-	-
2) Having a range of vocabulary	9	1	-	--
3) Punctuating meaningfully	9	1	-	-
5) Using the conventions of layout correctly e.g. in letters, reports, speeches etc.	10	-	-	-
5) Spelling accurately	8	2	-	-
6) Using a range of sentence structures	9	1	-	-
7) Using cohesive devices to link ideas	7	3	-	-
8) Developing and organizing the ideas clearly and convincingly	9	1	-	-

From the teachers' responses to the questionnaire (refer to table 4.2.2 (c)), it was revealed that 9 out of 10 teachers respondents shared the same view with the students that grammar instruction is very important in helping students to write well. Besides that, the teachers' responses showed a close match with the students' perception on the importance of having a range of vocabulary, sentence structures, punctuating meaningfully, using cohesive devices etc... in writing effective compositions. It can therefore be concluded that grammatical/linguistic correctness of the final product of students' composition is of great importance to teachers. The above view is also expressed by Morais (2000 : 3) that "teachers worked on the assumption that if they could help their students improve their knowledge of the language(competence), their students would be able to cope with the linguistic demands of actual use(performance)." However, despite great emphasis on the importance of teaching and learning of grammar by the teachers and students respectively, samples of marked compositions and comments from the teacher interviewees revealed that students' still make a lot of grammatical

grammatical errors in their compositions. In short, there is no relation between knowledge of grammar and the ability to write. However, we still find that an emphasis on the knowledge of the rules of grammar and linguistic competence is very much in practice and thriving in classrooms today.