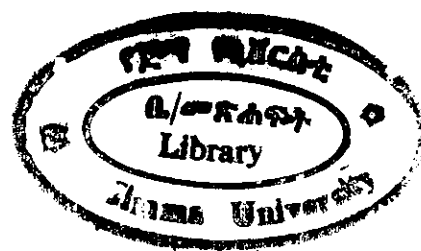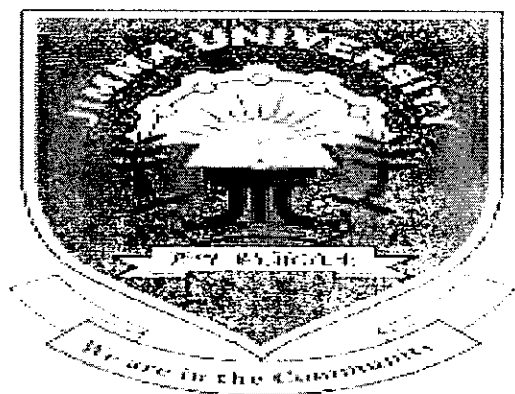JIMMA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

MA IN TEFL TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE (TEFL)

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN EFL PARAGRAPH WRITING: GRADE 11 IN JIMMA AND ELDAN PREPARATORY SCHOOLS IN FOCUS

BY

ZEWGE HAILE

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Master of Arts in TEFL

FEBRUARY, 2015

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JIMMA UNIVERSITY

Principal Advisor: Ato Tekle Ferede (Assistant Prof)

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FEBRUARY, 2015

Declaration, Confirmation, Approval and Evaluation

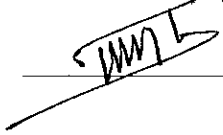**Research Title: A Comparative Study Of Students' Performance In EFL Paragraph Writing:** Grade 11 In Jimma And Eldan Preparatory Schools in Focus

Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that this thesis is my original work, not presented for any degree in any universities, and that all the sources used for it are duly acknowledged.

Zewge Haile _____ 27, July 2015

Confirmation and Approval

This thesis has been submitted for examination with my approval as a thesis advisor.

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Co-Advisor: _Yemanebirhan K._   _(signature)_   27 July 2015
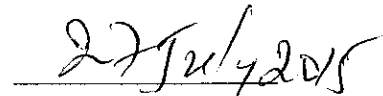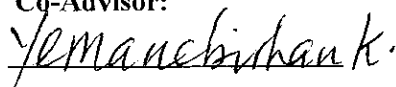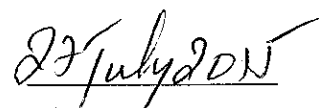
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Getachew Seyoum Chair-Person	_(signature)_	July 27, 2015 Date
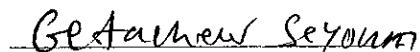
Abstract

This study focuses on a comparative study of students' performance in EFL paragraph writing: grade 11 in Jimma and Eldan preparatory schools. To this end, data were collected from 228 students through a paragraph test and interviews made with four English language teachers, and analyzed using statistical methods: percentage, mean, standard deviation and one sample t test. The study ascertained that the paragraph performance status among Grade 11 students in Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools was inadequate, below the Government Standards for scoring students' results. Even though it was found out that there aren't statistically significant differences between the two groups of students, the paragraph performance status of Jimma Preparatory School students was generally lower than that of their competitors at Eldan Preparatory School. Among the paragraph indicators, the two schools students' level of achievement was better compared from very good to satisfactory with paragraph legibility indicator only, for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively. Therefore, the students' EFL writing practice among the target students did not show a promising trend. Based on the findings, undivided attention for improving students' linguistic errors, meticulous attention that should be given for English language teachers in the professional growth parameter, motivating the learners at the center of writing classroom, mainstreaming writing with other macro and micro-skills, emphasizing on process approach over product approach of writing, strategies for self and peer (collaborative) learning and assessment, as well as evaluation and feedback mechanisms are recommended to improve the writing classroom trend.

I

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Table of Contents

IV

List of tables

Table No	Table Title	page

V

List of Figures

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The very purpose of this study was to investigate the competence level of preparatory students in EFL paragraph writing. Some people believe that *good* writing simply means writing that contains no mistakes--that is, no errors of grammar, punctuation, or spelling. In fact, good writing is much more than just correct writing. It is writing that responds to the interests and needs of the intended readers. Good writing has a clearly defined purpose. It makes a definite point. It supports that point with specific information. The information is clearly connected and arranged. The words are appropriate, and the sentences are concise, emphatic, and correct (Wells, 2000;Hart & Reinking 1990).

In EFL instruction, writing helps students learn more and better. Firstly, writing reinforces the grammatical structures, and vocabulary that the students were taught. Secondly, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have just learned to say and to take risks. Thirdly, when students write, they become involved with the new language: the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eyes, hand, and brain is a unique way to reinforce learning (Raimes, 1991).

Accordingly, the close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of any language course. Research also identifies the different components for producing a clear, fluent and effective piece of writing: content, the writing process, audience, purpose, word choice, organization, mechanics, grammar and syntax. Hence, correct language, mechanics, and logical content are considered important to enhance students' communication in written language, and increase their motivation that can lead to an exciting writing experience. English teachers in the preparatory level, thus, required to carefully plan and organize writing classroom activities so that their students consider writing an enjoyable, motivating and learnt experience, and develop the skills through process and selective practices aiming toward achieving intended writing goals.

- 1 -

Writing is a complex task [difficult activity] in which perceptual, motor, and cognitive processes interact (Graham &Weintraub, 1994), students can lack proficiency to write effectively. Depending on circumstances, we mean ineffective writing performance may be to say that 1) our students' writing is not well thought out, 2) it is not clearly organized, 3) it is not well documented or that it needs more detail or evidence, 4) it needs to be better edited, 5) it needs a more appropriate tone, 6) it needs to be better adapted to the situation for which it was written, or simply 7) it needs to be clearer, whatever that may mean (Lightbown, 2000). As a result, we often disagree about what constitutes good writing.

On the other hand, learners bring their own knowledge and experiences about writing and this has its value to the educational setting but they need further explicit experiences that will enable them to develop understanding about the knowledge, attitudes and skills and abilities involved in developing their writing.

English language teachers, therefore, should create classroom environments that provide students with opportunities to engage in interesting, personally relevant, challenging activities using students' variety of experiences and interests brought to the classroom, and learning becomes personally meaningful when students' prior knowledge and diverse experiences are connected with their present learning experiences. And it is the teacher's methods that should be appropriately integrated with the objectives and the contents of English writing skills that make the students to perform well in the class help them love writing skills and gradually adopt as a writer.

Several potential explanations exist for why learners may experience difficulties with writing but not limited to impaired cognitive abilities, poor motor planning, and differences in learning experiences (Judkins, Dague & Cope, 2009). Evaluating the writing capabilities of learners with writing difficulties is the starting point for providing needed guidance, and the results of such evaluation could serve as an invaluable resource for future interventions.

Quality writing is one way to demonstrate the learners' effectiveness. Using their writing experience, and confidence, the learners are required to effectively communicate with their peers, elders, people around them-in the authentic environment. In fact, writing has a number of

- 2 -

significant values for the students in their school practices and in their future careers. However, Ethiopian preparatory school students lack the ability to write with the standard quality due to various reasons: poor background and lack of sufficient exposure to writing, problem associated to goal-setting, lack of adherence to strategies which help improving their writing, lack of motivating classroom experiences, as well as error correction and feedback mechanisms. Investigating the possible factors against preparatory students' effective writing classroom performance, therefore, require the necessary attention and evidence-based mechanisms reducing the problems and fostering writing objectives to be achieved.

Then, paragraph development techniques they employ in the classroom and the purpose of writing students use; the kinds of feedback teachers obtain while they assess their students writing, and whether the students use the feedbacks to adjust their learning to developing effective paragraph performance are of pivotal values. From the comparative dimension too, the study analyzes the students' writing performances, taking various elements of an effective paragraph as variables to compare the students' paragraph performances. The test analysis can also serve as an invaluable feedback tool for the target schools.

Regardless of the fact that writing builds larger units from smaller ones; that is, writers use words to make sentences, sentences to make paragraphs, and paragraphs to make such compositions as letters, reports, and college themes (Hart & Reinking, 1990), the main focus of this research is assessing the students performances related to effectively expressing their opinions at the paragraph level, because paragraph writing or the organization of a paragraph is of primary importance to consider proper use of words, sentences, paragraphs and to write larger texts effectively.

1.2 Statement of the problem

This research is about students' writing performance in EFL writing classes: a comparative study on Grade 11 classes of two preparatory schools, Jimma and Eldan. Writing is an important skill, especially in the preparatory context of Ethiopia. Students at preparatory level are required to develop the ability to write effective paragraphs and longer texts with thoughtful acquaintance to

- 3 -

unity, coherence, cohesion, development, mechanics and appropriate language. Because preparatory level effectiveness in writing is a bridge for the students to enjoy the required competence when they join universities where they are required to write lots of term-papers, essays and projects.

The motive triggered this researcher to emphasize on this issue was that preparatory students writing competence needs prior attention. Their challenges and incapability should be improved before they go to the universities where lots of writing activities are given in their special courses; therefore, they are required to do a lot at their preparatory stage and keep acquaintances at least to paragraph basics at their competence.

Of great theoretical and practical importance, in the syllabus and text material of the Ethiopian Secondary Schools, it was clearly put that each and every learning opportunity and classroom activities are planned to improve the skills. The intended objectives are going to be achieved through different types of writing activities and tasks identified in the content for the students to develop the skill. Paragraph micro-skill is one area of emphasis in which preparatory students require to create acquaintance with a number of paragraph development.

In the most recently revised Ethiopian English text guide, Webb, (2003 E.C.) suggests that English teachers in preparatory writing classes are highly expected to guide the students perform writing tasks and activities using relevant strategies and tools that assist the students achieve effective sentences and paragraphs. It is specifically important for English language teachers to adhere with a variety of effective paragraph teaching strategies and experiences. Paragraph assessment techniques they employ in the classroom and the purpose they use; the kinds of feedback they obtain while they assess the students' paragraphs, and whether the students use the feedbacks to adjust their learning to developing effective paragraph writing performance are of pivotal values.

Setting writing goals and displaying contents contribute little without thoughtful and feasible strategies for improving the students' performance in sustainable ways. Communicating an expectation of success with the students will rise to the English language teacher's expectations hand-in-hand with the level of students' engagement and interaction in the class and (also at home)

- 4 -

to perform and develop effective writing. Setting proper and adequate feedback procedures, testing mechanisms to assess the students' performance abilities, and providing them special support on identified areas of weaknesses are valuable for the students to develop effective writing performance, too.

Self-directed learning strategy is also important because it can be strongly bound with the notion of student-centered and peer-learning methodology. The role and emphasis of the language teachers in student-centered learning were mentioned as keys in promoting the development of students' skills in thinking and writing. Self-directed learning strategy, therefore, is considered in paragraph level writing performance.

English language teachers require to help the students perform adequately to improve their writing skills as it is stipulated in the syllabus. Since preparatory students are highly required to engage in written communication, this researcher intends to investigate their performance pertinent to paragraph writing. The study intends to identify the types of errors the students may commit in EFL paragraph writing, based on common standards of paragraphing. The paragraph is the most important unit of a well-written essay. It has a specific structure and standards that make it effective and enjoyable to read. Thus, the proposed study emphasizes how well Grade 11 students in the two preparatory schools construct paragraphs with improved writing, better flow and clarity. It also aims to compare the two groups of students with regard to their paragraph writing skills.

This researcher argues that preparatory students should be able to, as a minimum requirement, to compose an effective paragraph and develop competence to extend their writing practices to effectively communicate in authentic situations beyond their classrooms. This researcher believes in that paragraph writing begins with effective structuring of sentences and the building block to maintain and sustain students' competence in writing longer texts. Paragraph level effective performance, in this regard, should be provided with a considerable emphasis because it helps to observe how the students could construct sound and meaningful sentence structures, and serves as a springboard to forcust their competence level in writing longer texts. The students' performances

- 5 -

and attitudes to effectively perform writing, therefore, is installed to well-organized paragraph, keeping such indicators as: unity, coherence, development, language and mechanics of English.

This researcher has observed some of the past researches related to the topic under investigation. Contextually, none of the observed past contributors' approaches had been directly relational with this investigator's approach and purpose. Internationally, a study entitled by; ''Analysis of Errors in Paragraph Writing in English by First Year Medical Students from the Four Medical Schools at Mahidol University,'' by Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, (2008) was referred. The study found out that most students understood the story in the passage they had read, and understood what they were asked to write but they had problems with the format of paragraph writing. The proposed study may resemble with this past research in that errors in paragraph should be analyzed as a sub-component; but is different in the emphasis (paragraph), the basic elements (paragraph unity, coherence, development, language and mechanics, focus group and method (comparison of paragraph writing in two preparatory schools).

Next, a case study entitled by, ''Improving Coherence in Paragraph Writing among ESL Learners'' (Hamzahand & Karuppiah, 1990) was also accessed by this researcher. From the analysis and findings of this past research, it is evident that the target students faced problems in relation to coherence while they write essays. In fact, coherence is the heart of the above study, but here, this researcher assumes coherence only as a single ingredient from the parameters (indicators) constituting students' paragraph writing effectiveness. This research emphasizes not only on coherence, but also topic sentence, unity, cohesion, order, variety, consistency in point of view, clarity, conciseness, language and mechanics and readability too, to evaluate student paragraph performance.

Finally, a study called "An Assessment of the Written Performance of the Sudanese EFL University Learners: A Communicative Approach to Writing,'' (Zakaria & Mugaddam, 2013) was referred by this researcher. This past study investigated the written performance of the Sudanese EFL students at tertiary level. The study had aimed to assess the written texts produced by the students in order to find out how successful they are in their use of writing as a mechanism through

which meaning is communicated. The findings of the study suggested that the writing proficiency of Sudanese university students was poor. The students lacked the basic skills required for communicative writing. In fact, the proposed research resembles with this past study for one thing that both studies emphasize assessment of the written performance, but the two are different in geographical area, problem identification and on focus groups. Since Zakaria & Mugaddam focused their attention on tertiary education, this research focuses on secondary level.

In Ethiopian context, ''The Practice of Constructing and Marking Composition Tests in Higher Education Institutions: English Department in Kotebe College of teacher Education In focus'' (Tedla Assefa, 2010) was observed. Tedla, attempted to assess the practice of constructing and marking of composition tests at Kotebe College of Teacher Education. The findings of this past study showed that both the construction and marking of composition tests had pitfalls on the provision of only a single writing task in one composition test, failure to set composition tests by officially established teams and to subject such tests to the comments of instructors other than the test setters, and lack of clarity of instructions, absence of a variety of stimuli such as tables, charts, graphs, etc. were some of the factors that affect the construction of composition tasks.

Though Tedla's work was totally different from this researcher's work in the subject matter and focus, for one reason this past research is relevant to mine in providing insight particularly in preparing the tool in paragraph testing; how to Provide uniform and non-distracting conditions of test administration, to avoid variability between one administration of a test and another. Thus, maximum care would be taken to ensure uniformity in the paragraph test administration as well as in the process of scoring.

1.3. Research Questions

This researcher has adopted the following basic research questions. These are clearly stipulated under Main and Specific Research Questions, below.

1.3.1 Main Research Question

How do Grade 11 students in Jimma (public) Preparatory School are compared in their paragraph writing abilities with Eldan (private) Preparatory School?

1.3.2 Specific research questions

1. How do the paragraph writing performances of Grade 11 students in the target schools are compared?
2. Is there a significant difference in paragraph writing performance between Grade 11 students in Jimma and in Eldan Preparatory Schools?
3. How do teachers perceive their students' paragraph writing abilities?

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The study has main and specific objectives:

1.4.1. Main Objective

The main objective of the proposed study is to compare Grade 11 students in Jimma Preparatory School (public school) with Grade 11 students in Eldan Secondary School (private school) with regard to their paragraph writing performance.

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Using indicators of effective paragraph such as: unity, coherence, development, language, mechanics..., evaluates the paragraph writing abilities of the target students.
2. Ascertain if there is a significant difference in paragraph writing performance between Grade 11 students in Jimma (public) and Eldan (private) Preparatory Schools.
3. Identify teachers' views of their students' paragraph writing ability.

1.5. Significance of the Study

Writing is an important part of communication. Students require to develop writing skills not only for the mere academic reason it contributes, but also for importance writing has in their real life communication, competence in their careers, and wider interactions they may entertain using writing.

The research, therefore, would have a number of contributions: One of the central components of writing a paper is a paragraph. Since paragraph writing remains one of the most important parts of writing, the findings, recommendations, and even the reviews, could support English language teachers to recognize the students' problems in writing paragraph. It is, therefore, believed to demonstrate valuable insights that may help to reduce problems associated with writing classroom strategies, and improve focus and attention so that the students develop better competence in their writing performances in the future.

The research also investigates students' EFL writing performances: undertaking paragraph level effectiveness as the cases of the two preparatory schools grade 11students in focus. From the comparative dimension, the study analyzes the students' writing performances, taking various features of an effective paragraph as variables to compare the students' paragraph performances. The test analysis can also serve as an invaluable feedback tool for the target schools.

Finally, the study may also serve as an input for those who may get interest to carry out similar assessments in students' writing skills or on other macro-skills performances.

1.6. Delimitation of the study

The study has certain geographical and conceptual delimitations. Because of time and resource constraints, this study cannot address all preparatory and/or secondary schools in Jimma Town. Among three preparatory and five secondary schools found in the town, the study focuses only on two schools. The study is also delimited to Grade 11.Since grade 12 students are going to sit for University Entrance Examinations sooner, they might give less attention to undertake writing skills

as their classroom routines, because it is assumed that both the teachers and the students in this grade are preoccupied with the process of revising and consolidating exam-related contents instead of considering skills acquisitions. Additionally, among the four English language main skills, the study emphasizes writing performances of the two target schools and classrooms. Hence, a comparative study on a paragraph level writing is made by taking samples of the two schools.

1.7. Limitations of the Study

Like most other researches, this study cannot be without limitations. It is limited to observe the problem from only two schools situations in a limited area. In addition, performance assessment in the writing skills is limited only to paragraph level effectiveness, never encompasses all levels and aspects of writing (i.e., word level, sentence and essay level writings). The respondents might supply data irrespective of the reality in the actual performance nature of the students. These drawbacks might affect the generalizablity of the findings.

1.8 Operational Definition of Important Term

Performance in paragraph writing: is a task or operation seen in terms of how successfully it is performed: the action or process of performing a task or function.

(Also linguistic performance) An individual's use of a language, i.e. what a speaker actually says or writes including hesitations, false starts, and errors. It is often contrasted with competence and synonymous with: carrying out, execution, discharge, conducting, conduct, effecting, accomplishment, achievement, completion, fulfillment, dispatch, or implementation. For the context, paragraph performance refers to the effective execution of paragraph keeping the basic components such as: unity, coherence, development, language and mechanics.

Mechanics (of English): In composition, the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. Some writing textbooks also include issues related to usage and organization under the broad heading of mechanics. The set of marks used to regulate texts and clarify their meanings, principally by separating or linking words, phrases, and clauses.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LTERATURE

2.1. The Writing Skill

Skill is the ability to do something well arising from talent, training, or practice; special competence in performance; expertness; dexterity. It is cleverness at doing something, resulting either from practice or from natural ability. Writing is a form of communication that allows students to put their feelings and ideas on paper, to organize their knowledge and beliefs into convincing arguments, and to convey meaning through well-constructed text. Writing English clearly is an important goal for all English learners. Speakers of different languages have different writing challenges that come from their own native language such as: the mixed use of English alphabets for Afan Oromo writing in Latin (Qubbe).

Writing skills are those needed to compose meaningful text of sentence length or longer, communicating ideas, messages and information in understandable words and language for a variety of audiences (Brohaugh, 2002). Hence, writing skill require choosing the target area to emphasize based on many factors; the level of the students, the average age of the students, why the students learning writing, and specific future intentions for the writing.

It is understood that writing performance in a foreign language tends to be one of the most difficult skills to acquire. This is true for English as well. The key to successful writing classes is that they are realistic in nature targeting the skills required or desired by students. Students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. Encouraging student participation in the exercise, while at the same time refining and expanding writing skills, requires a certain pragmatic approach. The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop. Next, the teacher needs to decide on which means (or type of exercise) can facilitate learning of the target area. Once the target skill areas and means of implementation are defined, the teacher can then proceed to focus on what topic can be employed to ensure student participation. By realistically combing these objectives, the teacher can expect both enthusiasm and effective learning.

Other important questions to ask oneself are: What should the students be able to produce at the end of this exercise? (a well written letter, basic communication of ideas, etc.) What is the focus of the exercise? (Structure, tense usage, creative writing) (Patricia, 1992). Once these factors are clear in the mind of the teacher, the teacher can begin to focus on how to involve the students in the activity thus promoting a positive, long-term learning experience.

2.2. The Importance of Writing

In most languages, writing is a complement to speech or spoken language. It is the communication of one's ideas to other people and the externalization and remaking of thinking. Writing is not a language but a form of technology. With in a language system, writing relies on many of the same structures as speech, such as vocabulary, grammar and semantics, with the added dependency of a system of signs or symbols, usually in the form of a formal alphabet. The result of writing is generally called *text*, and the recipient of text is called a reader. Motivations for writing include publication, storytelling, correspondence and diary. Writing has been instrumental in keeping history, dissemination of knowledge through the media and the formation of legal systems.

Writing skill helps the learner to gain independence, comprehensibility, fluency and creativity in writing. Writing skills are specific abilities which help writers put their thoughts into words in a meaningful format to mentally interact with the message. Good writing skills allow the students to communicate written message with clarity and ease to a far larger audience than through face-to-face or telephone conversations. The students might be called upon to write a report, plan or strategy at work; write a grant application or press release within a volunteering role; or they may fancy communicating ideas online via a blog. And, of course, a well written CV or résumé with no spelling or grammatical mistakes is essential if they want a new job (Patricia, 1992). Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are then key in written communications. The reader will form the writers' opinion, the author, based on both the content and presentation, and errors are likely to lead them to form a negative impression.

As students learn the steps of writing, and as they build new skills upon old, writing evolves from the first simple sentences to elaborate stories and essays, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and

- 12 -

organization come together and grow together to help the student demonstrate more advanced writing skills each year (Patricia, 1992).

O'Farrell (2010) suggests as the truth is that writing skills play a larger part in one's professional life than they may realize. Good writing skills, thus, can help individuals come across as more credible, more capable, than a colleague who frequently has types and grammatical errors. People with good writing skills are generally seen as more credible. According to Randall & Katharine, (1991); writing skills can be the ticket to better college grades and greater academic achievement. Becoming a proficient writer should be one of the major objectives of many students, especially for those who want to become members of international business, administrative or academic communities (Tribble, 1997).

In terms of EFL instruction, writing helps students in many circumstances; first, it reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary that they were taught. Second, when students write, they also have a chance to be adventurous with the language, to go beyond what they have just learned to say and to take risks. Third, when they write, they necessarily become involved with the new language; the effort to express ideas and the constant use of eyes, hand, and brain in a unique way to reinforce learning. Therefore, a close relationship between writing and thinking makes writing a valuable part of English language. As writing is a process that flows gradually, then, we need to give our students time to explore and experiment with writing; we will begin to see evidence of growth.

2.3 Levels of Writing

Levels of writing constitutes: word and phrase level writing, sentence level writing, paragraph level writing and writing longer texts. Hence, maintaining appropriate level of detail in any body of text is a part of ensuring that the cognitive effort required by the reader is appropriate to the general subject of the written as a whole. Authors use level of detail to maintain continuity in syntactic hierarchy in texts, such as a screen plays (Linda & Keith, 2005). Continuity in text is achieved by using transitional expressions to move from one detail, or level of detail, to another (Michael, 1996). Within the basic writing structure

of introducing, characterizing and bringing to a close of any proper subject description level of detail is used in theme development during elaboration, evaluation and adding context as a repertoire of retrieval strategies (Gerald, Charles, & Walter, 2000). Although the general rule that the level of detail must be both sufficient and appropriate for the author's audience and their subject in literature intended for experts, it is also used in primary and secondary education to assess student understanding. In general the depth of detail is gradually developed to one appropriate for the subject (Jeff, 2006).

2.3.1. Word and Phrase Level Writing

English has four major word classes: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. They have many thousands of members, and new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are often created. Nouns are the most common type of word, followed by verbs. Adjectives are less common and adverbs are even less common. The different word classes can form the basis of phrases. When they do this, they operate as the head of the phrase. So, a noun operates as the head of a noun phrase, a verb as the head of a verb phrase, and so on. Students in this phase can spell most words correctly and are developing an understanding of root words, compound words, and contractions. This understanding helps students spell similar words.

Moodle (2012) says, you can use words or short phrases which help to guide your reader through your writing, and to link sentences, paragraphs and sections both forwards and backwards. Good use will make what you have written easy to follow; bad use might mean your style is disjointed, probably with too many short sentences, and consequently difficult to follow. Your mark could be affected either way. The best way to get feel for these words is through your reading. Most text-books and articles are well-written and will probably include a lot of these cohesive devices. Note how they are used and try to emulate what you have read. But make sure that you fully understand their meaning: incorrect use could change completely what you are trying to say. Try to use a variety of expressions, particularly in longer pieces of writing.

Despite the fact that imprecise or incorrect word use will lessen the clarity and the credibility of the students' word and phrase level performances, this research does not make any attempt to

focus on word and/or phrase level writing performance. Because, for one reason, word and phrase level writing competence is assumed to be well developed by the students in the preceding classes; the other reason, by taking paragraph as an assessment criteria for the students writing performance, one can consider through the paragraph, the students' efforts in word and phrase uses and sentence structures too.

2.3.2. Sentence Level Writing

Writing in English begins with the sentence. Sentences are then combined into larger Structures such as paragraphs, essays, business reports, etc. There are four sentence types in English. A declarative sentence "declares" or states a fact, arrangement or opinion. Declarative sentences can be either positive or negative. A declarative sentence ends with a period. The imperative form instructs (or sometimes requests). The imperative takes no subject as 'you' is the implied subject. The imperative form ends with either a period or an exclamation point. The interrogative asks a question. In the interrogative form the auxiliary verb precedes the subject which is then followed by the main verb (i.e., Are you coming ....?). The interrogative form ends with a question mark. The exclamatory form emphasizes a statement (either declarative or imperative) with an exclamation point (Moodle, 2012).

Beare (2013) pointed out that sentence patterns can be understood as the way sentences are usually structured. It is important to learn the most common sentence patterns in English, as most of the sentences we will hear, write, and speak will follow these basic patterns. There are a number of common sentence patterns used to write most sentences in English. The most basic sentence pattern is a noun followed by a verb. It's important to remember that only verbs that do not require objects are used in this sentence pattern. This basic sentence pattern can be modified by adding a noun phrase, possessive adjective, as well as other elements.

Beare indicates that the next sentence pattern builds on the first pattern and is used with nouns that can take objects. The next sentence pattern builds on the first pattern by using an adverb to describe how an action is done. Linking verbs are also known as equating verbs - verbs which equate one thing with another such as 'be', 'become', 'seem', etc; one need to place adjectives after

using a linking verb. Linking verbs are often used in simple sentences with the adjective describing the subject of the sentence. We require placing verbs immediately after subjects. Remember that there are both helping verbs and main verbs. In positive and negative sentences the main verb follows the helping verb (Beare, 2013).

There are various types of adverbs in English. Adverbs are usually placed in three positions based on which type of adverb is used. Connecting adverbs such as 'however', 'consequently' and 'firstly'... are placed at the beginning of sentences. Make sure to follow a connecting adverb with a comma. Time adverbs and some adverbs of frequency are also sometimes used at the beginning of sentences as a form of stress. Adverbs of frequency such as 'often', and 'sometimes' are placed in the middle of sentences directly before the verb. Other adverbs used in the middle of sentences include adverbs of certainty such as 'probably'. Adverbs of manner, place and time are usually placed at the end of sentences to illustrate how something is done, where something is done and when something is done. Objects follow the verbs of which they are objects.

They can be preceded by modifiers such as 'some', 'a lot of', etc. or prepositions. English has both direct objects and indirect objects. Direct objects refer to the object that is affected and indirect objects refer to whom or for whom something is done. When using both a direct and indirect object, the indirect object usually comes first. The indirect object is placed after the direct object when a preposition such as 'for' or 'to' is used. When both direct and indirect object are pronouns, place the indirect object last generally preceded by the preposition 'to' (Moodle, 2012; Beare, 2013).

In upper division courses, advanced students are (hopefully) not making the same mistakes as entering students, so we can attend to errors that create confusion within sophisticated arguments. At this level, we are also concerned–and indicate–if students fail to evidence sentence variety or demonstrate stylistic problems such as wordiness or choppiness in their prose (Fairclough, 1992). Simple sentences contain no conjunction (i.e., and, but, or, etc.). Compound sentences contain two statements that are connected by a conjunction (i.e., and, but, or, etc.).Complex sentences contain a dependent clause and at least one independent clause. The two
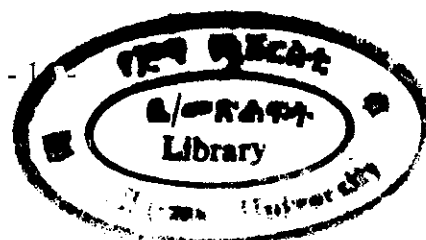
clauses are connected by a subordinator (i.e., which, who, although, despite, if, since, etc.). Compound - complex sentences contain at least one dependent clause and more than one independent clause. The clauses are connected by both conjunctions (i.e., but, so, and, etc.) and subordinators (i.e., who, because, although, etc.) (Moodle, 2012).

As was indicated by Freedman (1993); common errors in sentence structure are the following:

Errors of greater concern: (1) Unnecessary passive constructions, especially "It is," "There are," etc.; (2) Unclear pronoun references; (3) Restrictive vs. nonrestrictive modifier confusion (including which/that distinction); (4) Misplaced and dangling modifiers; (5) Faulty parallelism; and (6) Incorrect pronoun case (pp.55).

Errors of lesser concern: Freedman (1993) includes (1) Omitted commas; (2) Superfluous commas; (3) Apostrophe errors as errors of lesser concern in writing.

Though sentences are very important components in writing effective paragraph, this researcher doesn't provide an exclusive attention on the preparatory level students' sentence performance, rather, sentence structures and patterns would be analyzed to a paragraph level effect.

2.3.3 Paragraph Level Writing

A paragraph conventionally begins on a new line, which is sometimes indented. A paragraph is a series of sentences related to a single topic. That may sound simple enough, but finding the right topic, building sentences with good details, and connecting those details clearly can sometimes be a challenge (Nordquist, 2012). Paragraphing is "a way of making visible to the reader the stages in the writer's thinking" (Ostrom, J. 1978 cited in Nordquist, (2012). Although conventions about the length of paragraphs vary from one form of writing to another, most style guides recommend adapting paragraph length to your medium, subject, and audience. Ultimately, paragraphing should be determined by the rhetorical situation (Emerson, 2005).

Paragraphing is not such a difficult skill, but it is an important one. Dividing up your writing into paragraphs shows that you are organized, and makes an essay easier to read. When we read an

essay we want to see how the argument is progressing from one point to the next. The following principles should guide the way paragraphs are written for undergraduate assignments: (1) every paragraph should contain a single developed idea; (2) the key idea of the paragraph should be stated in the opening sentence of the paragraph; (3) use a variety of methods to develop your topic sentences; and (4) Finally, use connectives between and within paragraphs to unify your writing (Emerson, 2005).

In one of the early L2 writing process studies, Fairclough (1992) analyzed that writing is an activity that takes time and cannot be treated as a one-step affair. He argues in that one needs to be very conscious of how paragraphs work together to communicate one's information and make it easy for his/her audience to understand. A basic understanding of paragraph style and structure is , therefore, paramount for preparatory students, as this will not only improve the quality of their work, but will often also result in obtaining higher grades further in their university courses.

Fairclough (1992) in his work further suggests as; a paragraph should contain one main point or controlling idea, and consists of a number of sentences, namely: a topic sentence, a number of supporting sentences, a concluding sentence. He adds that paragraphs can be of any length, but as a general rule it is required to avoid very short or overly lengthy paragraphs. The length of a paragraph largely depends on the purpose of the paragraph, and what you have set out to talk about in your topic sentence. A paragraph that is too long is difficult for your audience to follow. A paragraph that is too short may indicate insufficient development of the main idea.

Avoid a one/two-sentence paragraph. A paragraph needs a topic sentence, followed by sentences of elaboration and explanation (i.e. supporting sentences) and ultimately concluded with a 'concluding sentence' which reinforces your arguments and thesis statement.

A topic sentence sums up the main idea of the paragraph – it tells your audience what the paragraph is about. A topic sentence: performs the same function as the introduction, which provides a preview of your assignment is usually found at the beginning of a paragraph – the first or second sentence (Fairclough, 1992b). The first sentence can also connect the paragraph to the previous paragraph. Since paragraph writing performance is the very focus of this study, basics of

- 18 -

paragraph writing such as: unity, coherence, development, language and mechanics would be widely discussed in the following pages.

2.4 Paragraph Writing

There are two structures to learn in English that are important in writing: the sentence and the paragraph. Paragraphs can be described as a collection of sentences. These sentences combine to express a specific idea, main point, topic and so on. A number of paragraphs are then combined to write a report, an essay, or even a book.

2.4.1. What is a Paragraph?

The study conducted by Zemach and Islam (2005) indicates that a paragraph is a group of sentences that discusses a smaller idea and all relates to a single topic. To make a successful paragraph, we begin with a main idea. This idea is explained, developed and reinforced in the paragraph, with evidence provided. Sentences flow smoothly, connecting to each other and to the essay as a whole. Martin (2008) suggested that a paragraph can give information, tell an opinion, explain something, or even tell a short story. Effective paragraphs help readers to follow our line of reasoning or argument.

One of the central components of an essay or a paper is the paragraph. We may think that a paragraph is ideally 5 sentences put together, or a paragraph has a topic sentence, etc. But the essential definition of a paragraph is " It is a group of sentences or a single sentence that forms a unit" (Lunsford & Connors, 1995, p.116). In this definition the term "unit" or "unity" is the most important element. It is the unity and coherence among the sentences that makes a paragraph a paragraph. A paragraph is much more than a collection of connected sentences. It is a building block of essay development, and paragraphs provide the structure needed to develop to a text.

Rajatanun (1998) on his part stated that a paragraph is a unit of writing which expresses one central idea and consists of two kinds of sentences: a topic sentence and a number of supporting statements. Besides, O'Donnell & Paiva (1993) provided more details about the essential parts for paragraph writing which include a topic sentence, supporting sentences, details, logical order, logical connectors, a concluding sentence, unity and coherence. Hence, the ideas in the paragraph must be presented in logical order by using transition words which indicate the relationship between the ideas. Unity and coherence are so considered to be the main components of a good paragraph (Wyrick 1999), because it can show the logical relationship between the main idea and

the supporting details with the required word combination, grammar usage and punctuations.

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

In general, the purpose of a paragraph is to express one point, idea or opinion. This main idea is expressed through three sections of a paragraph: *beginning*, introduces the writer's idea; *middle*, explains the writer's idea; and *end*, makes the writer's point again, transition to next paragraph.

Topic sentence is a sentence which states your idea, point, or opinion. This sentence should use a strong verb and make a bold statement. Supporting sentences provide explanations and support for the topic sentence (main idea) of your paragraph. Supporting sentences provide the evidence for your topic sentence. Supporting sentences that include facts, statistics and logical reasoning are much more convincing that simple statements of opinion. The concluding sentence restates the main idea (found in your topic sentence) and reinforces the point or opinion. Concluding sentences repeat the main idea of your paragraph in different words (Fairclough, 1992).

In similar way, Folse, et.al (2008) states that in order to be able to write a paragraph, we have to know what a paragraph consists of. There are three parts in a paragraph. The first part is introduction, which creates reader's interest and states the main idea in a topic sentence. Every paragraph needs to make one main point. This point is located in the topic sentence. Usually, but not always, the topic sentence is the first sentence of the paragraph. The topic sentence helps the reader understand what the paragraph is about. The second part is the body, in which the main idea is developed with specific details, explanations and examples. Thus, all of the other information in the paragraph must be connected to the ideas contained in the topic sentence. (Folse, et.al 2008).The last part of a paragraph is conclusion, which brings the paragraph to a logical conclusion. The concluding sentence usually states the main point again or summarizes the main idea of a paragraph. In addition, it can offer a suggestion, an opinion, or a prediction (ibid: 10).

Most writing has an introductory paragraph or an introduction of a few paragraphs, and a conclusion of a few paragraphs or concluding paragraph. The introduction and conclusion are, of course, supported by body paragraphs. The typical body paragraph develops, supports, or elaborates a given topic sentence. Most paragraph structures longer than 1-2 sentences have common elements (Maxine, 1992). For example, expository paragraphs have three important elements common to most paragraphs: *flow, or unity* (a clear connection to the rest of the essay and placed in a sensible way among the other paragraphs; *development* (detailed, specific support or elaboration of the main idea); and *coherence* (each sentence clearly relates to the previous and next sentence in an understandable and sensible manner). Persuasive paragraphs focus on developing a strong argument that would convince someone who disagrees with the writer's position.

Maxine, (1992) further suggests as that narrative paragraphs have similar features of flow (or unity) and coherence. However, the development might be more related to the action or events narrated in the paragraph than to supporting an argument. Coherence in a narrative paragraph usually comes from the chronological order of the "story" or narrative. Similarly, a descriptive paragraph might find its development through giving a series of sensory details or of abstract ideas that describe an object (or concept or theory), rather than through support. These two types of paragraph - narrative and descriptive - differ only slightly in these respects from expository paragraphs, but the differences are still important.

Logically flowing sentences: To help develop logically flowing sentences, ensure the information you present is logical in nature, builds upon the topic sentence or the main idea. Ensure that you use transition signals to smooth the sentences within the paragraph and ensure that the paragraph is well structured with a topic sentence and a concluding sentence at the start and end of your paragraph respectively (Fairclough, 1992).

Logical flow within a paragraph / supporting sentences: Logical flow should also occur within a paragraph. Each sentence should follow on to the next – the move from one sentence to the next should be logical. Information included within a paragraph should be presented in a logical,

sequential manner. The use of transition signals such as 'furthermore, moreover, in addition and consequently' can help you achieve better flow in your paragraphs.

Concluding sentence: Your paragraph should end with a concluding sentence which is where you will summarize your arguments on the topic, as well as reinforce the overall message of each paragraph. A concluding sentence is vitally important at the end of each paragraph to clarify your arguments and thinking for your reader. The ideas in the paragraph must be presented in logical order by using transition words or connecting words which indicate the relationship between the ideas (chronological, causal, etc.). A paragraph may have a concluding sentence, which restates the main idea in a different way. According to Reid (1994), the concluding sentence summarizes the material, offers a solution to the problem, predicts a situation, makes a recommendation, or states a conclusion.

2.4.2. The Principle of Good Paragraph Structure

The study conducted by Rosen-Behrens, (1997) indicates that the unity of sentences refers to tightness with that of the main idea. Thus, the first characteristic of an effective paragraph is unity, which means that all sentences in the paragraph explain, develop, and support a central idea in some way. In other words, every paragraph must have a purpose within our paper, and all the sentences must somehow advance that purpose. This means that all sentences—topic sentence, supporting ones, and concluding sentence must be more than loosely related to the sub-topic. They must all advance the paragraph's purpose.

According to Rosen Behrens, (1997); the sentences should be organized in a logical manner and should have a definite plan of development- coherence. In addition to unity and coherence a paragraph should also be well-developed, that is, idea discussed in the paragraph should be adequately explained and supported through evidence and examples. These ideas, of course, should all work together to explain and support the controlling idea of our paper. The division of a chapter into paragraphs must be made according to the changes of ideas introduced. There is, therefore, no rule as to the length of a paragraph. It may be short or long according to the necessity

- 23 -

of the case. A paragraph may consist of a single sentence or of many sentences. For our convenience, the research emphasizes to assess the students' paragraph taking word counts (a minimum of 150 words so as to analyze paragraph effects against built indicators of effective paragraph such as: topic sentence, unity, coherence, development, language, and mechanics of English, therefore, the candidates are going to write a number of sentences than a single sentence alone.

2.4.2.1. Unity in Paragraphs

The first and most important principle to be observed in constructing a paragraph is that of unity. Just as each sentence deals with one thought, each paragraph must deal with one topic or idea – and with no more than one. Unity in the paragraph means oneness of idea. A good paragraph possesses unity when all the sentences develop the main idea (Rosen Behrens, (1997). Unity in the paragraph is achieved by the use of (1) a topic sentence with its controlling idea (2) supporting details, and (3) a clinching sentence (Mark, 2009). Unity is a very important characteristic of good paragraph writing. Paragraph unity means that one paragraph is about only one main topic. That is all the sentences – the topic, supporting sentences, the detail sentences, and (sometimes) the concluding sentence – are all telling the reader about one main topic.

Then, unity is the quality of oneness in a paragraph that results when all the words and sentences contribute to a single main idea. The essential quality of a paragraph should be unity. A paragraph is supposed to have a central idea, and everything in the paragraph relates to and develops that idea. The reader finds no surprises, and every sentence fits with the others. Moreover, according to Maxine, (1992), the sentences follow each other in logical order so that one could not move the sentences around at random: each one needs to be in its particular place to advance the internal development of the paragraph.

A good check on unity is to ask yourself if every thing in your paragraph or essay is subordinate to and derived from the controlling idea. Make sure that your controlling idea--the topic sentence or thesis--indicates the subject and the focus on that subject. Do not confuse unity and coherence.

Coherence involves the clear movement of thought from sentence to sentence or paragraph to paragraph; unity means staying on the topic by staying within the focus (Lee & Kelly, 2012). Paragraphs may not have a topic sentence, but they must have unity and purpose. All the ideas in a paragraph should relate to a clear point readers will easily understand (Mark, 2009).

The unity which every young writer should seek is not the unity of perfection, but the unity which comes from the conception of a discourse as a whole, and from the harmonious arrangement of the parts in conformity with that conception. Every composition that s/he writes should be 'a body, not a mere collection of members'--a living body. Its life must come partly from the writer's natural qualities, and partly from his acquired resources whether of matter or of language. Familiarity with good authors will stimulate his/her powers of expression, and constant practice under judicious criticism will train them.

Therefore, a key quality of an effective paragraph is unity. A unified paragraph sticks to one topic from start to finish, with every sentence contributing to the central purpose and main idea of that paragraph. But a strong paragraph is more than just a collection of loose sentences. Those sentences need to be clearly connected so that readers can follow along; recognizing how one detail leads to the next.

To achieve unity, begin with a clear topic sentence. This doesn't mean that it has to appear at the beginning of the paragraph, although a topic sentence usually does in academic writing. What is important however is that the main idea or purpose, stated in the topic sentence, sets the agenda for the rest of the paragraph. Because the topic sentence provides the unifying idea, this sentence must be clear, concise and make a point about our paper. A good topic sentence provides the bones of a paragraph that support the skin and muscle of all the sentences that follow (Adams,1995). Once we know what point we want to introduce in our topic sentence, we can create a unified paragraph by making sure that all the rest of the sentences are clearly related to the first one.

2.4.2.2.Coherence in Paragraph

Coherence refers to a certain characteristic or aspect of writing. Literally, the word means "to stick together." Coherence in writing means that all the ideas in a paragraph flow smoothly from one sentence to the next sentence. With coherence, the reader has an easy time understanding the ideas that you wish to express (Lee & Kelly, 2012).If the sentences in the paragraph should relate to the topic sentence to effect a unified whole, these sentences should further be arranged in an orderly sequence and linked to one another to ensure a smooth progression of ideas from one sentence to another (Mark, 2009). Thus, coherence makes the paragraph easily understandable to a reader.

You can help create coherence in your paragraphs by connecting one sentence to another using: (1) Parallel constructions; (2) Pronouns; (3) Synonyms; (4) Repetition of key words; (5) Transitional words (Maxine, 1992).Systematic sentence organization (adequate development): from general to specific, from specific to general, order of importance, chronological order, space order, steps, cause – effect, comparison and contrasts, as Maxine (1992) adds.

Coherence of a paragraph is the logical connections that readers or listeners perceive in a written or oral text flow, those visible links which bind the sentences of a paragraph, can be established in two basic ways. The first is to establish a master plan at the beginning of the paragraph and to introduce each new idea by a word or phrase that marks its place in the plan. The second concentrates on linking sentences successively as the paragraph develops, making sure that each statement connects with the one or ones preceding it (Thomas, 1998).

Coherence in a paragraph is the technique of making words, phrases, and sentences move smoothly and logically from one to the other (Givon, 1993). In other words, the ideas are so interwoven and glued together that the reader will be able to see the consistent relationship between them.It is obvious that if a paragraph is not unified, does not have a logical order, and does not have a consistent point of view, the reader is unlikely to grasp the point of the paragraph. In addition, there are other devices and techniques that will help you achieve coherence (Givon, 1993).

- 26 -

Order (also coherence) is thus the logical sequence of thought or development of the subject. Events must be related in the order of their occurrence, and all ideas should be connected with the leading idea and arranged according to their importance or order. The two most important sentences in the paragraph are the first and the last. The first, which should as a rule is the topical sentence, should arouse the interest of the reader; and the last should satisfy it. The first, or topical, sentence states the topic – a fact, a statement, or a proposition; the last should bring the whole paragraph on the topic to a conclusion, or summing up. In general, the coherence devices most helpful for making our communication clear for the reader are transitional words and phrases, repetition of key words and phrases, pronoun reference, and parallel sentence structure.

2.4.2.3. Cohesion in Paragraph

A paragraph with clearly connected sentences is said to be cohesive. Thus, it is essential to clarify here. According to McNamara, et al. (1995); it represents how words, constituents, and ideas conveyed in a text are connected on particular levels of language, discourse and word knowledge. Thus, cohesion is related to the connections which are grounded inexplicit linguistic elements; i.e., words, features, cues, signals, constituents and their combinations.

According to most models of cohesion in English, cohesive items play an important role in perceiving texts as unified and meaningful. These models attempt to account for the explicit linguistic devices used in texts to signal relations between sentences. Halliday & Hasan (1976) in McNamara, et al. (1995) cite five types of cohesive ties: (1) Reference (i.e. the indication of information from elsewhere such as personals, demonstratives and comparatives). (2) Substitution (i.e. the replacement of one component by another). (3) Ellipsis (i.e. the omission of a component). (4) Conjunction (i.e. the indication of specific meaning which presupposes present items in the discourse such as additive, adversative, casual, and temporal). (5) Lexical cohesion (i.e. the repetition of the same or relative lexical items).

Wyrick (1999) states lexical cohesion is the most advanced cohesive means and thus the most difficult one to grasp. McNamara, et al. (2005) state: Lexical cohesion is a cover term for the cohesion that results from the co-occurrence of lexical items that are in some way or other typically associated with one another. When two or more lexical items within a sentence or across sentence boundaries are combined together the cohesive effect of lexical cohesion is achieved. This research also focuses on cohesion on reference, conjunctions and lexical cohesions for they are easily applicable by the students to show connections on words and sentences.

2.4.3. Adequate Development

Effective paragraphs are not only unified, they are fully developed, which means that they don't leave any significant questions in readers' minds. When we are writing a paragraph, we must be sure to trace the full development of our ideas for readers so they will understand the assumptions, evidence and reasoning we used. There are three ways to ensure that our paragraphs are fully developed; by providing the right level of supporting detail, choosing the right kind of evidence and choosing the right pattern of development for our purpose.

A paragraph is well-developed when the writer has given sufficient information to make the reader feel the topic sentence has been sufficiently discussed (Edda, 2009). The topic (which is introduced by the topic sentence) should be discussed fully and adequately. Some methods can be used to make sure our paragraph is well-developed.

2.4.3.1. Developing Paragraphs with the Right Level of Details

Hibbard and others (1996) on their work suggest that to fully develop the sub-topic of the essay's main idea in a paragraph, you must provide your readers with details. It is not enough to make assertions. Your readers must understand fully how you reached your conclusion. What leads you to the conclusion you make in the paragraph? What texts and ideas do you refer to that influenced your thinking? What reasoning do you use? To make sure you've provided the right level of detail,

try using the 5WHs to imagine what questions an informed reader might ask. Does your paragraph give enough detail to answer important what and when questions? Does it answer who, where, and why questions? Although you will probably not have to address all of these, a fully developed paragraph provides enough supporting detail to answer questions any engaged, informed reader might ask.

2.4.3.2. Developing and Choosing Paragraphs with the Right Kind of Detail

Not only is it important to provide enough detail for your readers, it's important to provide the right kind of detail, and that will depend on the purpose of your essay. The kind of detail will also depend on the demands of the assignment and the discipline you are writing in. For example, if you are asked to write a personal essay, your details might be examples of personal experiences. If you are asked to write a history paper, the right kind of details might come from your analysis of a historical text, and support in an argumentative essay might come from both analysis and reasoning (Vermunt, 1992).

Another way to think about choosing the right kind of detail is in terms of warm or cool proofs. Warm proofs are those that appeal to emotions. On the other hand, cool proofs, like logical arguments and statistics, appeal to reason and are more in keeping with classical ideas of logos, or logical thought. If you think about choosing details in this way, then a history paper might use a combination of warm proofs (e.g., personal histories and letters from the historical era) in addition to the cool proofs (e.g. reasoning and logic). Again, the choice of detail will depend on your writing purpose, which flows from the demands of the assignment and the requirements of the discipline you are writing in Vermunt, 1992).

2.4.3.3. Using an Ordering Principle to Achieve Coherence

One way to achieve the flow of coherence is to decide on an ordering principle for the ideas in the paragraph. This means that there is a pattern of development that creates a logical flow between the sentences. Narrative paragraphs use a chronological ordering principle and usually relate events connected by time. We will usually find narrative paragraphs using transitions of time like

"then," "next," and "finally." There are many other ordering principles used to create coherent paragraphs including comparison-contrast and cause-effect methods. The important point is to choose one method that fits our material, and make sure we use it consistently to link the ideas in our paragraph together. The research also attempts to investigate the extent English teachers provide a considerable attention to help their students develop a principle of ordering to achieve coherence in their paragraph writings (Hibbard et al, 1996).

2.4.3.4. Using Transitional Words and Phrases to Achieve Coherence

A paragraph is the container for only one idea. Often, a longer paragraph can - and should - be divided into smaller units. Usually a large, complex idea is made up of smaller ideas and can be explained in more paragraphs with those smaller ideas. The point, though, is to have one coherent paragraph - all of the ideas in each sentence of the paragraph must relate to a single main point. That point is most often made in a topic sentence (Givon, 1993). A paragraph is coherent when all of its sentences are written clearly, logically, and in a manner that is easy to follow.

Transitional words and phrases also help to create coherence by providing bridges between sentences within the paragraph and between paragraphs. For example, words and phrases like "also," "in addition to," "additionally" and "furthermore" signal your readers that that the relationship between two sentences is one of addition. Other word and phrase groups can create relationships of detail or example ("for example," "that is," "more specifically"), logic ("therefore," "thus," "in conclusion"), contrast ("yet," "nevertheless," "on the other hand") or similarity ("likewise," "similarly," "in other words"). (See this link for more lists of transitional words and phrases Brundage & Lahey, 2007). To the point, the proper use of a variety of cohesive, devices and also the application of appropriate punctuations requires proper consideration. As repeatedly demonstrated in the textbook (Webb, 2003 E.C.) too, the advantage of cohesive devices and punctuations is not only to advance the writing classes, but also emphasized with, to enhance the students' pace with grammatical accuracy as of their grammar lessons; and yet the students are objectively evaluated in their formative and summative tests. This research, therefore, provides a considerable room if English teachers give credibility or emphasis

for their students' properly apply and develop the applications of cohesive devices and also the mechanics in paragraph writing.

2.4.3.5. Grammar in Paragraphs

Every sentence in a paragraph must be grammatically correct, in so much as that grammar aids in understanding the ideas that the writer would like to convey. The topic sentence, in particular, must be very well written and very clear to readers (Adams, 1995; Beare, 2013). One of the most effective ways to improve our own writing is to spend time reading the best writing of others.

As was stated by Beare (2013); there are certain important points to be considered for writing effective paragraphs: *Subject-verb agreement:* all subjects in English sentences are either singular or plural. A singular subject needs a singular verb, or a plural subject needs a plural verb. Ignore words (within the commas) that come between the subject and verb. *Sentence fragments:* a sentence fragment is a group of words that does not express a complete idea, and cannot make sense on its own. To complete it, additional information needs to be added. *Run-on sentences:* a run-on sentence occurs when two independent clauses (of two complete thoughts) are blended into one without proper punctuation. *Active Vs Passive voice:* usually, effective writing uses the active voice and dodges the passive. However, particular situations are awkward or incorrect when expressed in the active voice. Learners should be always encouraged to do remedial exercises. In fact, ability to write or communicate cannot be fulfilled unless the grammar is there, in the competence of the writer (Campbell & Nancy, 1997).

2.4.3.6. Readability of Paragraph

Not the least, readability refers to the combination of structural and lexical difficulty. Since the language of a text may be difficult for one student and easy for another, it is necessary to assess the right level for the students; to do this, teachers must first assess the level of the students themselves. Leykin and Tuceryan (2004) state that one of the conditions to regard any text as a readable one is that this text should contain information that can be applied in the environment where the reader lives. Additionally, this text should be of an interest for the reader to read it

lovingly and interestingly and, thus the reader can understand what he is reading continuously.

Michael et al. (2003) say that to consider the text as a readable one, it should contain information that has some relation to the background information and previous knowledge in the reader's mind. This previous knowledge may refer to background social, political, economic, cultural and linguistic knowledge. This research, therefore, provide a considerable attention in order to investigate the extent English teachers grapple to make the students keep the required legibility and readability in their writings.

Punctuations are the set of marks used to regulate texts and clarify their meanings, principally by separating or linking words, phrases, and clauses. Marks of punctuation include ampersands, apostrophes, asterisks, brackets, bullets, colons, commas, dashes, diacritic marks, ellipsis, exclamation points, hyphens, paragraph breaks, parentheses, periods, question marks, quotation marks, semicolons, slashes, spacing, and strike-through (Flower & Hayes, 1984).In composition, the conventions governing the technical aspects of writing, including spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and abbreviations. Some writing textbooks also include issues related to usage and organization under the broad heading of mechanics (Furneaux, 1998). The rules of punctuation are, in fact, only broad guidelines. They vary across national boundaries and even from one writer to the next. Still, understanding the principles behind the common marks of punctuation will strengthen our understanding of grammar and help us to follow the conventions consistently in our own writing (Halpern, 1997). Despite the above fact, this research emphasize on the mechanical aspect of students' writing mainly on proper capitalization, spelling and punctuation.

2.5 Assessing Paragraph Writing

In using assessment techniques, it is recommended that teachers process assessment focusing on assessing students as writers. Process assessment examines what students do as they write, the strategies they use, and the decisions they make as writers. Three measures of process assessment that need to be introduced to the teachers are writing process checklist, student-teacher assessment conferences, and self-assessment by students. Both students and teachers can use these measures to keep track of completed work, to reflect on students' growth as writers, and for grading.

A writing process checklist includes characteristic activities and considerations for each stage of the writing process, from gathering and organizing ideas during prewriting, to publishing compositions in the last stage. Students use the checklist to monitor their movement through the writing process. Similarly, teachers use the checklist as they observe students writing and participating in related activities (Canale, & Swain, 1990).

According to Tompkins, (1994); the use of product assessment by the teachers is logical because the teachers applied the product approach in teaching writing. In the product approach, the teachers do not monitor the process students' use as they write; rather the focus is on the assessment on the quality of students' finished product. Process assessment examines what students do as they write, the strategies they use, and the decisions they make as writers.

Therefore, the solely use of product approach in teaching writing may have some impacts on students' writing skill as both the grammatical accuracy and fluency are equally important in the formation of writing skill, which include language skills and the skills in organizing ideas.

Although EFL learners often assess their own learning ability, considerable research has suggested that errors in self-assessment do occur; EFL students sometimes underestimate or overestimate their language ability (MacIntyre et al., 1997). Part of the reason is that the affective factor of language anxiety may particularly bias the self-perceptions of second/foreign language competence (Dornyei, 1995; MacIntyre et al., 1997). As mentioned by Dornyei (1995), perceptions of self-efficacy determine the amount of effort expended in pursuing a goal. In other words, students' beliefs in their capabilities play a crucial role in their ability to learn how to write. When EFL learners have low self-efficacy of writing competence, they expend less effort, with less success.

Apparently, self-efficacy not only indicates students' actual proficiency, but also probably assesses some affective construct, such as language anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 1997). Previous research has shown strong relationships between language anxiety and both subjective and objective indices of proficiency. For example, MacIntyreet al. (1997) found a stronger relationship between language anxiety and subjective self-perceptions of proficiency than between language anxiety and objective

- 33 -

proficiency measures. Clement et al. (1994) has also shown that perceived competence and anxiety are more closely related than are self-ratings of competence and objective achievement. These findings suggest that the mismatch between the subjective perception of competence and the actual competence results from "error" in predicting one's language ability.

Students at a higher anxiety level are to beless confident when writing in class. Many students' anxiety levels increase when they particularly receive negative evaluations from teachers. As a result, more anxious students tend to demonstrate low self-efficacy and show less confidence in writing so as to perceive themselves a lower English writing proficiency (Shang, 2012).

2.5.1. Assessment of Performance-Based Writing

Assessment of performance-based writing is not an easy task for teachers of writing. It can be seen as a time-consuming and complex activity. When assessing writing tasks raters are required, raters' subjectivity may play an important role. Raters' biases towards student performances, their different perceptions of good writing and their cultural and professional backgrounds are all factors that can influence the rating (Cumming et al., 2002).

2.5.2. What is Performance-based assessment?

Performance-based assessment represents a set of strategies for the application of knowledge, skills, and work habits through the performance of tasks that are meaningful and engaging to students (Hibbard et al, 1996). This type of assessment provides the teacher with information about how a pupil understands and applies knowledge. Moreover, performance-based assessments can be integrated into the instructional process thus providing additional learning experiences for students (Brualdi, 2002).

The benefit of performance-based assessments, have been well documented. However, some teachers are hesitant to implement them in their classrooms. One reason for that might be that these teachers feel they don't know enough about how to fairly assess a student's performance (Airasian, 1991). Another reason for reluctance in using performance-based assessments may be previous

experiences with them when the execution was unsuccessful or the results were inconclusive (Stiggins, 1994).

From past researches, process writing - as distinguished from product writing (as to Wyrica, 1997) is playing a large role in ESL classes. Writing is seen as a communicative act with an intended purpose and audience. The teacher and other learners help the writer find a topic and revise drafts of a written piece until it conveys the intended meaning. Patricia, (1992) says; the key to successful writing classes is that they are realistic in nature targeting the skills required or desired by students. Students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. Encouraging student participation in the exercise, while at the same time refining and expanding writing skills, requires a certain pragmatic approach. The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop.

You must beware that not all hands-on activities can be used as performance-based-assessments (Wiggins, 1993). Performance-based-assessments require pupils to apply their knowledge and skills in context, not merely complete a task on cue.

Effective assessment requires a clearly defined purpose. Thus, you must ask yourself several important questions: What am I trying to assess? What do my pupils need to know? What prerequisite skills do my pupils need to have? At what level do my pupils need to perform? Will it the same level of performance be required of all my pupils? What type of knowledge is being assessed: reasoning, memory, or process (Stiggins, 1994). By considering the above issues, we can decide what type of activity best suits our assessment needs. After we have defined the purpose of the assessment, we can decide what activity will serve our purpose and what tasks should be included in it.

There are some things that we must take into account before we choose the activity: time constraints, availability of resources in the classroom, and how much data is necessary in order to make an informed decision about the quality of a student's performance (Brualdi, 2002). Thus, raters need to keep many things in mind while they mark in order to maintain rating reliability and validity of the rating.

- 35 -

A number of research studies have contributed to the study of rating process. Cohen (1994) explored several studies of both first and second language writing (e.g. Clement, et al. 1994; McNamara, et al., 1995) and found that raters are likely to focus on grammar and mechanics more than they realize. Also, raters tend to employ criteria different from the central guidelines they get (McNamara, et al., 1995).

Moreover, the score given to the same piece of writing by different raters and that given to different pieces of writing by the same raters may be different. Besides, some issues such as students' handwriting, time of marking in a day, or teachers' preferences towards students may also cause bias in assessing writing (Cummings, et al., 2005).

There are tendencies that teachers with different backgrounds will have different perceptions towards good writing and thus tend to focus more on some specific features. Stiggins(1994) conducted a study to investigate how different native speaker English teachers and nonnative speaker English teachers rate their Chinese university students' writing. The teachers were asked to rate writing samples holistically using their own criteria and to provide three reasons based on the rank of importance to support their judgment. The results showed that though both groups of raters gave similar scores to the writing, they weighted writing features differently in their rating.

Teachers can also have different perceptions and practices regarding rating criteria. In Brualdi's (2002) pilot study exploring Thai teachers' perspectives in writing assessment practices, he found that the teachers had different views towards criteria and employed them differently. Even though they had central criteria to follow, they applied them in individual ways. Some teachers tried to follow the criteria though they did not agree with them. Some added their own criteria when marking students' work.

To understand more about writing assessment practices, it is worth exploring raters' perceptions concerning good writing and writing assessment as well as investigating how they actually mark their students' writing. As Canale& Swain (1990: p. 763) stated "if we do not know what raters are doing (and why they are doing it), then we do not know what their ratings mean."

Assessment researchers distinguish between two types of performance-based assessment activities that can be implemented in the classroom: informal and formal (Stiggins, 1994). When a student is being informally assessed, the student does not know that the assessment is taking place. As an EFL teacher, we probably use informal performance assessments quite frequently. Besides assessing the linguistic aspects of our pupils' learning, we may use informal assessment to assess extra-linguistic aspects of our pupils' learning as well. One example of assessing in this manner is how pupils interact and cooperate (Stiggins, 1994). Another example is assessing a pupil's typical behavior or work habits.

When a student's performance is formally assessed, we may either have the student perform a task or complete a project. We can either observe the student as he/she performs specific tasks (formative assessment) or assess the quality of end products (summative assessment). A student who is being formally assessed should be appropriately informed about it.

Assessment criteria reflect the elements of the project/task that will be employed to determine the success of the pupil's performance. We also find such criteria in the English Curriculum. The benchmarks for each domain are followed by assessment criteria on a performance continuum between foundation and proficiency levels.

We may of course, use additional resources to access assessment criteria. These ready-made criteria may prove to be very useful to us. However, we need to be aware of the fact that some lists of criteria may include too many or two few aspects to be assessed or may not fit the needs of our pupil population. With this in mind, we must be certain to review criteria lists before applying any of them to our performance-based-assessment. We will probably need to come up with our own criteria most of the time. Airasian (1991) suggests that we take the following steps when we do so:

1. Identifying the overall performance or task to be assessed, and perform it yourself or imagine you performing it.

2. Listing the important aspects of the performance or product.

3. Trying to limit the number of performance criteria, so they can all be observed during a pupil's performance. If possible, having groups of teachers think through the important behaviors included in a task. Expressing the performance criteria in terms of observable pupil behaviors or product characteristics is mandatory. Using unambiguous words that cloud the meaning of the performance criteria. Arranging the performance criteria in the order in which they are likely to be observed, allowing our pupils to participate in this process are all referred as good ideas.

We could do allowance of pupils to participate in the process can be made by asking the pupils to name the elements of the project/task that they would use to determine how successfully it has been completed (McIntyre, et al., 1997). Therefore, having clearly defined criteria will make it easier for us to remain objective during the assessment. The reason for this is the fact that we will know exactly which skills and/or concepts that we are supposed to be assessing. If our pupils were not already involved in the process of determining the criteria, we will usually want to share them with our pupils. This will facilitate them in knowing exactly what is expected of them. Hence, this researcher participate the students and teachers in designing the paragraph writing test on the principles and procedures of performance based assessment.

On the other hand, in order to harness the potential of formative assessment in the writing classroom, it is self-evident that classroom assessment practices be geared towards maximizing student learning. This provides the impetus for the study, which investigates an EFL teacher's attempt to implement formative assessment in their writing classroom and its impact on their classroom practice and students' beliefs and attitudes to effectively develop writing skills.

2.5.3 Designing Criteria for Evaluating Students' Writing

Evaluating EFL students' writing is not an easy thing and sometimes as teachers we are not able to grade students' written assignments using the right evaluation criteria. So, it is common that some of our students feel frustrated about the results of their compositions. We need to know that the evaluation results are not going to be perfect, but as language teachers we can find different instruments and ways to grade more accurately considering the students' needs.

- 38 -

Many experts encourage EFL instructors to create their own rubrics since every assignment and every group of students is different. Although developing a rubric is not easy especially at the beginning, to make the scale elaboration process easier, we can follow some steps and recommendations.

For example, O'Malley & Valdez (1996); suggested the following steps to design writing scales successfully:

1. Determine the focus of your assessment (what is the task that is going to be graded and what significant knowledge, skills, learning objectives and processes you are going to evaluate).

2. Review previous students' work and/or other rubrics to identify any additional assessment criteria.

3. Define how many performance levels are necessary to describe the knowledge skills and processes associated with the task.

4. Decide which levels of performance are appropriate to evaluate the task.

5. Choose your assessment criteria.

6. Adopt a scale for describing the range of products/performances and write a description for each dimension for each point on the scale.

7. Decide the format that you will give to your rubric.

8. Develop a draft rubric.

9. Evaluate the rubric.

10. Have a pilot test, revise the rubric, and try it again.

11. Share the rubric with other teachers and students, so that they can understand it and give you feedback.

12. Evaluate the end product. Compare students' individual work with the rubric to determine if the instrument is appropriate for the task (pp. 98-99).

In the subsequent report, English teachers' application of demandable criteria for evaluating the students' writing, therefore, would be considered in the actual investigation.
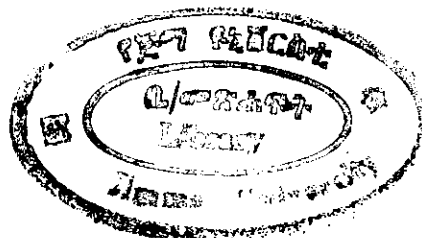
2.5.5. Authentic classroom assessment

A well accepted position among educational researchers and teacher educators is that the best classroom assessments are authentic (Wiggins, 1996).The term best typically means valid and authentic usually defined as having something to do with the real world. This study conducts a conceptual analysis of authentic as it is used to describe a type of classroom writing assessment limited to paragraph level performance.

All authentic assessments are performance assessments, but the inverse is not true (Wiggins, 1996) . A commonly advocated best practice for classroom assessment is to make the assessments authentic. Authentic is often used as meaning the mirroring of real-world tasks or expectations. There is no consensus, however, in the actual definition of the term or the characteristics of an authentic classroom assessment. Wiggins (1996), probably the most cited authenticity advocate, argues that teachers should "test those capacities and habits we think are essential and test them in context. Make them replicate within reason, the challenges at the heart of each discipline. Let them be- authentic, and presented four basic characteristics of authentic tests:

1. The task should be representative of performance in the field.

2. Attention should be paid to teaching and learning the criteria for assessment.

3. Self-assessment should play a great role.

4. When possible, students should present their work publicly and defend it (p.102).

Paris & Ayres (1994) describe authentic assessment in terms suggesting that authenticity requires that the assessments be formative. They join some who argue that authentic assessment, because it is formative, creates reflective students and teachers. Whether an assessment is authentic depends on local contexts, they contend that what is authentic in one school is not necessarily authentic in another, because authentic assessment is defined by locally valued outcomes of the curricula and must be aligned with instructional methods. The emphasis on the formative nature of the testing and the need for individualized customized context results in somewhat a typical criteria for authenticity. Authentic assessment, according to Paris &Ayres (1994):

- 40 -

1. supports classroom instruction,

2. collects evidence from multiple activities,

3. Promotes learning and teaching among participants, and

4. Reflects local values, standards and controls (p.105).

This list does not match Wiggins' lists except for the need for data from multiple sources. Interestingly, while a necessity, presumably, for reliable measurement, that particular requirement does not actually reflect the nature of real world activities, so is not driven by that key dimension of authenticity. It also includes a variety of assessment procedures such as learner- centered assessment, student designed tests, portfolio assessment and self-assessment that the teacher and students can collaboratively choose and use successfully in language classrooms.

CAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design, methods and procedures used to carry out the study and other methodological issues that are followed to conduct the research; these are population of the study, the sampling techniques and sample size, data collection tools and procedures and method of data analysis.

3.1 Research Design and Method

This research employs a comparative design because the main purpose of the researcher is to compare and describe students' performance in EFL writing, in Grade 11 classes of two preparatory schools: Jimma and Eldan. Comparison is one of the most efficient methods for explicating or utilizing tacit knowledge or tacit attitudes. Comparative research is the act of comparing two or more things with a view to discovering something about one or all of the things being compared. The objects are cases which are similar in some respects but they differ in the other (Heidenheimer, Hugh & Carolyn,1983). The design of comparative research is simple. Like cases are treated alike, and different cases are treated differently; the extent of difference determines how differently cases are to be treated. These differences become the focus of examination. The goal is to find out why the cases are different: to reveal the general underlying structure which generates or allows such a variation.

The method is also versatile: we can use it in detail work as a complement to other methods, or the entire structure of a research project can consist of the comparison of just a few cases. In the comparative study, this researcher examined two cases; how Grade 11 students in Jimma Preparatory School were compared in their paragraph writing abilities with their counter parts in Eldan Preparatory School. Hence, on the right where a column was reserved for each case, here called "Case 1" and "Case 2". On the basis of the target of the study the researcher decided which were the interesting aspects, properties or attributes that the researcher would have to note and record for each of the cases. These aspects were called A, B and C. During the process of analysis, the researcher then could add new aspects or drop out fruitless ones. Those aspects that were

similar in both the cases need not be recorded, because here the researcher would not make two case studies but only a comparison of the cases.

Some studies make use of both Quantitative and Qualitative Research, letting the two complement each other. Since this study aimed to find out what the dominant behavior was towards the students writing performance behavior in the two preparatory classes, and at the same time aimed to examine why this was the case, it is then ideal to make use of both methods. Therefore, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were used in the study. In a nutshell, quantitative research generated numerical data or information that could be converted into numbers. Qualitative method, on the other hand, generated non-numerical data. In terms of objectives, the primary aim of a Qualitative Research was to provide a complete, detailed description of the research topic. It is usually more exploratory in nature while Quantitative method focused more in counting and classifying features and constructing statistical models and figures to explain what was observed.

Quantitative method was believed to provide the researcher a clearer picture of what to expect in the research. The data was obtained from a relatively large population, then, it could be difficult and unmanageable to reach and gather research data from the entire population at a time. Quantitative method, therefore, was convenient to rely on precision of obtainable data in a cost effective way, balancing reasonable composition of the student-informant groups to test performance. Since this researcher used test measurement on the students' paragraph performance, quantitative data that would most likely appear in the discussion were tables containing data in the form of numbers and statistics.

Qualitative data was a categorical measurement expressed not in terms of numbers, but rather by means of a natural language description. Qualitative method was considered to be particularly suitable for gaining an in-depth understanding of underlying reasons and motivations. It provided insights into the setting of a problem. At the same time, it frequently generated ideas and hypotheses for later quantitative research.

The reason behind using qualitative method was that it helps to generate in-depth idea and information by the help of semi-structured interview prepared for Grade 11 English language

- 43 -

teachers drawn from the two target schools. Thus, it served to get additional, relevant pieces of information, balancing the inadequacy by the mere dependency of the former, quantitative, method. It also helped to maintain relevant information aiming to examine ''why this is the case,'' and helps to fill the information gap which might be unintentionally undermined by the researcher.

3.2. Population and Sampling

The participants in this study included English teachers and Grade 11 students in two preparatory schools. The students and teachers belonged to Jimma and Eldan Preparatory Schools in Jimma Town. The former was a government school while the latter was privately owned. Teachers were chosen based on the fact that they had been teaching English language in Grade 11 classrooms of the two preparatory schools so that they were assumed to possess information about their students' paragraph writing performance.

According to 2014/15 enrolment statistics of the two schools, the number of Grade 11 students in the academic year was:

- Jimma Preparatory School consists of 532 Grade 11 students, who were distributed to 16 classrooms, and 6 English language teachers.
- Eldan Preparatory School contained 250 Grade 11 students who were distributed to 5 classrooms, and 2 English teachers. Jimma University Community School was not taken because it was not considered as a private school.

Since taking the entire students into the data supplying climate was challenging and ineffective in terms of cost and time, the research relied on samples, thus, the researcher drawn 30% of the students' samples. Sample size, 30% was to maximize the number of participants and ensure better representatives since the population size was relatively small. Therefore, Grade 11 students from the target schools were estimated as: Jimma Preparatory School = 532 X 30% = 160 participants; and Eldan Preparatory School = 250 X 30% = 75 participants, which made a total of 235 student-samples.

Therefore, the study relied on 235 samples drawn from a sum total of 782 student population brought about from the two target schools. The study also included the sum of four English

language teachers, who teach in Grade 11 classrooms of the two target schools, from whom 3 of them were obtained from Jimma Preparatory, who hold the highest classes among other English language teachers. The remaining 1 English language teacher was taken from Eldan, who teaches the highest class.

Hence, in order to determine the actual student samples, this researcher used *Systematic Random sampling method.* In systematic random sampling, the researcher first randomly picked the first item or subject from the population. Then, the researcher selected each n'th subject from the list. The procedure involved in systematic random sampling was very easy and done manually. The process of obtaining the systematic sample was much like an arithmetic progression.

Starting   number:

The researcher selected an integer that had been less than the total number of individuals in the population. This integer corresponded to the first subject.

Interval:

The researcher picked another integer which served as the constant difference between any two consecutive numbers in the progression. The integer was typically selected so that the researcher obtained the correct sample size. For example, the researcher has a population total of 100 individuals and need 12 subjects. He first picks his starting number, 5. Then the researcher picks his interval, 8. The members of his sample will be individuals 5, 13, 21, 29, 37, 45, 53, 61, 69, 77, 85, 93. Other researchers use a modified systematic random sampling technique wherein they first identify the needed sample size. Then, they divide the total number of the population with the sample size to obtain the sampling fraction. The sampling fraction is then used as the constant difference between subjects.

In reference to the above illustrated interval technique used with systematic random sampling, this researcher attempted to allow 10 samples from each of the 16 classrooms of Jimma Preparatory school by an interval of 5 the sampling fraction. Therefore, 16X10 = 160. For Eldan Preparatory School, the required samples from each of the 5 Grade 11 classroom were fixed by obtaining 15

students, calculated an interval of approximately 3.3 (i.e., simultaneously obtaining 3 and 4 as the sampling fractions for the convenience of determining n^{th} subjects/ samples).

Advantages of Systematic Sampling:

The main advantage of using systematic sampling over simple random sampling was its simplicity. It allows the researcher to add a degree of system or process into the random selection of subjects.

Another advantage of systematic random sampling over simple random sampling was the assurance that the population would be evenly sampled. On the other hand, using *Extreme Case Sampling* method, this researcher determined the sample teachers from Jimma and Eldan Preparatory Schools. Hence, three Grade 11 English teachers from Jimma Preparatory and one Grade 11 English teacher from Eldan Preparatory were drawn. The very advantage of Extreme *Case Sampling* method for English teachers of the two target schools was to obtain teachers who had a relative better classroom exposure with the target students.

No	Name of the school	Teachers' population	Samples	Sampling technique	Students' Population	Samples (30%)	Sampling technique
1	Jimma Preparatory	6	3	Extreme Case	532	160	Systematic Random
2	Eldan	2	1	Extreme Case	250	75	Systematic Random
		8	5		782	235	

Summary Table Showing Samples and Sampling Methods

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

3.3.1. Writing Test : The data for this study was collected through written test and interview. Paragraph writing was used to collect data from the students, while teachers were interviewed. Specifically, a semi-structured interview was made with 4 Grade 11English language teachers.

Since the purpose of this research was to make a comparative study on Grade 11 students' writing performance, so that paragraph writing test was assumed to be a more reliable tool to investigate the students' writing performance.

The students were asked to write one paragraph on a given topic to a limited **(150)** word counts. The numbers of participants on the test were 235, from whom 160 candidates were obtained from Jimma Preparatory, and the remaining 75, from Eldan, respectively. The participants were given adequate time necessary to effectively accomplish the paragraph-based writing test common to all candidates. The topic was associated with the sort of common experience in which students engaged during their daily life. Thus, all the candidates wrote on the same topic, **''The Sport Game I Like Most.''** Such topic is believed to be authentic for majority of the students; the topic could help the students fetch ideas from what they usually entertain, talk, hear, and watch. This might enable them to write freely and comfortably because they could address things which were meaningful to them; and allow them option to develop in one of the major paragraph development pattern.

Raimes (1993) argues that when a meaningful writing task is assigned to the students, they will put more thought and efforts into a piece of writing that communicate their ideas and opinions to the reader. In this regard, the topic (**''The Sport Game I Like Most**) is assumed convenient for the concept and the experience that all the candidates may commonly have about, and for the meaning and interpretations the students may put in their paragraph. The reason behind offering the same topic is to enable the participants to deal with an issue that will hold their common interests and equal amount of challenge to be shared among all the candidates in the two target schools.

- 47 -

3.3.1.1. Requirements for Paragraph Writing Test: The following requirements were observed for paragraph writing test:

1. All the candidates need to use a white sheet of paper that would be distributed by the invigilator. Smaller sizes and other colors are not acceptable. No decorations or fancy borders are to appear on the paper.

2. Candidates, instead of names, are expected to write code numbers (to be provided by the invigilator(s)), and also the name of the school and the date on the spaces provided to do so.

3. All paragraph written papers must be handwritten. Typed work will not be accepted.

4. All the candidates should write the paragraph within the given time, and in front of the invigilator. No assignment is taken to home for another day submission.

5. Jimma Preparatory School candidates are invigilated either in 3 separate exam-rooms or in the school hall accommodating all the candidates into one; Eldan Preparatory candidates are invigilated in a hall, one wider classroom or two, depending on the situation.

7. In order to avoid correction biases, common criteria will be applied. These include: topic sentence, paragraph unity, coherence, development, language and mechanics with separately assigned values each of the elements contain for scoring.

3.3.1.2. Criteria of Marking, Method of Scoring and Recording

Undertaking paragraph writing test in the study, and adopting relevant set of rating criteria from a number of scholarly sources, a five-points marking criteria were developed to evaluate each aspect of paragraph performance, so that the average scores were calculated from 100%. The breakdown of the indicators and corresponding marks were indicated below.

Criteria of Marking:

a) Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence (contains 9 points);
b) Coherence - the logical flow of ideas (9 points);
c) Cohesion - proper use of transition words and connectors (5 points);
d) Paragraph development with the right kind, the right level of details and with the right pattern of development (9 points);
e) Language-correctness of vocabulary and grammar (8 points);
f) Correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization (6 points); and
g) Legibility- readability (4 points).

- 48 -

Finally, rating from 50 is multiplied (--X 2) to get individuals score from 100%.

Method of Scoring and Recording:

Later on, the total rating of each candidate's paragraph test was reduced to a 5 points-scale for ease of result interpretation. Hence, candidates' paragraph writing performance effectiveness level with obtainable mean value of: **0.05-- 1.49** was considered as **very low**; **1.50-- 2.49**, as **low, 2.50-- 3.49**, as **satisfactory**; **3.50-- 4.49, high**; and **4.50-- 5.00**, was considered as **very high effectiveness practice** respectively. The frame of reference for paragraph writing test analysis was adapted from Cumming et al., (2002).

In addition to this, Government Standards for interpretation of test scores was used as a reference. To that end students' paragraph scores were assigned the following results:

> 90—100% = Excellent
>
> 80—89% = Very Good
>
> 70 --- 79 = Good
>
> 60---79% = Satisfactory
>
> 50---59% = Fair, and
>
> Below 50% = poor respectively

As Connor & Carrell (1993) state, raters are the most significant component of the rating process because they can make decisions about scale features they will focus on, how to adapt scale wording to suit their situations, and how they justify the written texts according to their educational contexts and requirements. Rating needs to keep many things in mind in order to avoid different perceptions of good writing; maintain rating reliability and validity (Cumming et al., 2002). One problem concerning paragraph (or text) marking was that rating requires closer investigation to each and every aspect of the candidates' work (cumbersome task); and it needs a single-eye inspection of errors plus a one-shot correction to all the papers. Hence, rating reliability was kept constant through intra-rating procedure, a rating process in which the same person (by default, the researcher himself) controls the whole candidates' work with a single-eye inspection, i.e., taking correction and rating tasks as the researcher's own responsibility, but was accomplished

with in a span of 5- working days as once this process was started. The process of recording made by the researcher and invited assistants.

3.3.2. Interview

The rationale behind the interview was to reveal some of aspects of the students' written performance which could not be obtained through the other means, test. The interview was made with Grade 11 English language teachers, who were 4 in number. The interview mainly focused on how the teachers view their students' paragraph writing ability. Semi-structured interview format served the purpose. Due time constraints, the researcher had not involved in conducting a pilot study.

3.4. Procedure of Data Collection

The process of data collection took place through the following steps. Firstly, data gathering tools were developed and subjected to the comments of the researcher's thesis advisor for validity and reliability. Then, the final versions of these instruments were typed and made ready for application. Following this, prior to data collection, the consent of the officials of the target schools and the cooperation of the concerned teachers were obtained. Finally, the target teachers were involved to assist the researcher in the test administration procedure according to their convenience, which was conducted with the proposed time-line. Next, the interview was held according to the time and venue preference of the interviewees.

3.5. Data Analysis

The data that was obtained through different tools were quarantined for error and relevance, then organized in logical way to help answer the leading research questions. The quantitative data (the test scores) were analyzed using SPSS software, test-score analysis method (such as: percentage, mean, SD, and t-test) to calculate similarities and variance and describe students' paragraph writing performance characteristics. Quantitative comparison was made on table based analysis comparing two cases; how Grade 11 students in Jimma Preparatory School were compared in their paragraph writing abilities with their competitors in Eldan Preparatory School. Hence, on the right

where a column was reserved for each case, Case 1 and Case 2, and tried to ascertain if there was a significant difference in paragraph writing performance between the schools. Qualitative data categorical measurement was expressed not in terms of numbers, but rather by means of a natural language description. Here, the research analyzed teachers' perception of their students' paragraph writing abilities and the problems and gaps connected to students' writing performance optionally obtained by the interview tool.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As indicated in earlier chapters, this study examined the reading comprehension abilities of Grade 11 students in Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools, the perceptions of English language teachers regarding students' paragraph writing abilities and differences in paragraph writing ability between the two groups of students. This chapter deals with the findings of the study and in two parts. The first part reports the findings focusing on the characteristics of the respondents which include teachers and students and presents the findings in accordance with the research questions and the corresponding objectives. The second part, on the other hand, compares and contrasts the major findings from writing comprehension test administered to a sample of Grade 11 students selected from the two schools and an interview held with English language teachers. It also tries to relate the findings to the relevant literature. The analyses on the data collected through these techniques are thus presented in the following sections.

4.1. Findings

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, the number of samples was 4 teachers. The researcher had successfully drawn 228 sample students from Grade 11 classrooms. These students were supposed to take a paragraph test. Unfortunately, five of the students' papers from Jimma Preparatory School and two of the students' papers from Eldan (a total of seven response papers) were screened out for response misuses, i.e. they wrote too short paragraphs.
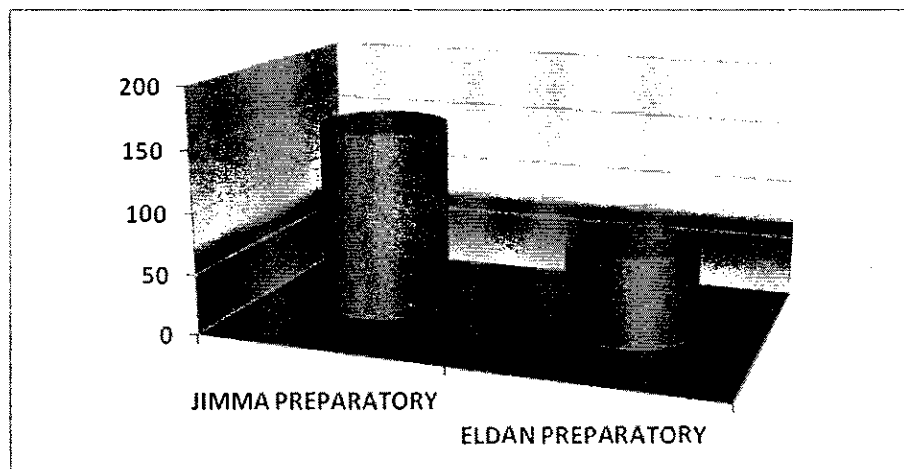
Figure 1: Sample Student-Respondents from the two schools
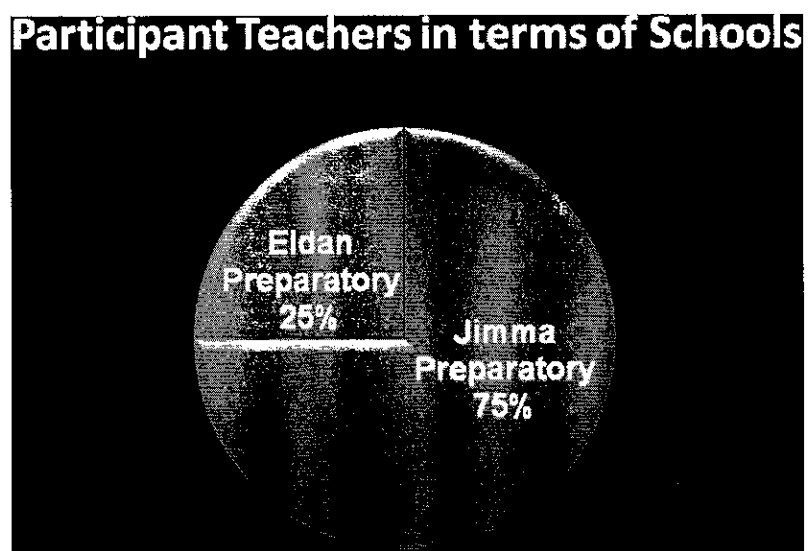
Figure 2: Teacher-Respondents from the two schools

From the above figure we observe the combination of teachers' respondents from the two target schools.
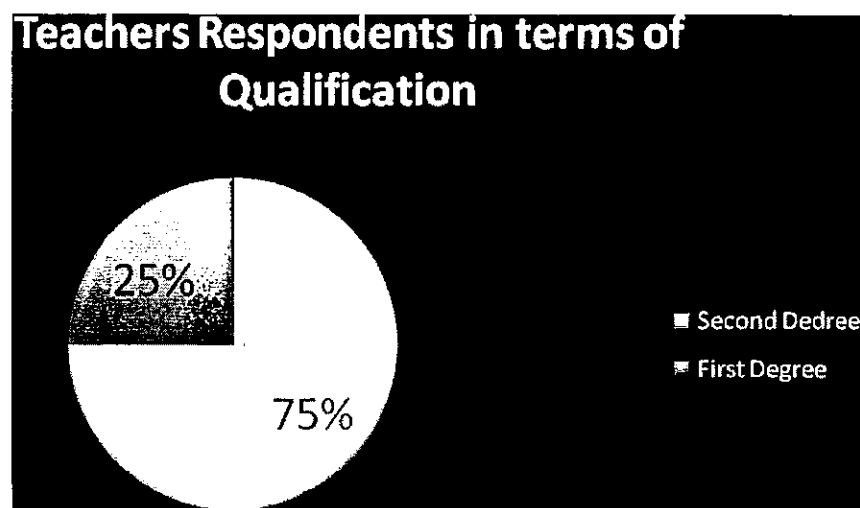
Figure 3 : Teacher-Respondents in terms of Qualification

The above figure illustrates the qualification level of the respondent teachers. From the 3 sample teachers taken from Jimma Preparatory school, 2 had master's degree and 1, bachelor degree while the remaining 1 sample teacher drawn from Eldan Preparatory had a master's level qualification. Hence, from the majority of well-qualified teachers, this researcher assumed that they may better recognize what this researcher wanted to investigate; collaborate with this researcher while conducting the interview; and provide genuine and relevant pieces of information for the success of the study.

Hence, the analysis was done on the responses of 4(100%) of the teachers and 228 (97%) of the students.

General criteria for conducting the paragraph test was placed for the students with the purpose of paragraph performance; and standard indicators, with proposed values for each, were set in order to effectively score the candidates' achievements in the paragraph performance test. These were:

a) Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence (contains 9 points);
b) Coherence - the logical flow of ideas (9 points);
c) Cohesion - proper use of transition words and connectors (5 points);

- 54 -

d) Paragraph development with the right kind, the right level of details and with the right pattern of development (9 points);
e) Language-correctness of vocabulary and grammar (8 points);
f) Correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization (6 points); and
g) Legibility- readability (4 points).

Finally, rating from 50 was multiplied (--X 2) to get individuals score from 100%.

The students were provided relevant and adequate information on what and how of the writing process on a short seminar before they were engaged into the paragraph writing test. They were asked to write a paragraph on the given topic to a limited (not more than 200) word counts. With the help teachers' consultation, the participants were given adequate time (an hour) necessary to effectively accomplish the paragraph-based writing test. The topic was assumed to be associated with the students' experience in which the students are engaged during their daily life. Thus, all the candidates had to write on the same topic, '*'The Sport Game I Like Most.*'' Such topic was believed to be familiar for the majority of the students. The topic was deemed to help the students generate ideas from what they usually entertain, talks, hear, and watch. This could enable the student-writers to write freely and comfortably because they could address things which were meaningful to them. The topic was selected through brainstorming.

The Assessment strategy used was performance based assessment of paragraph. Process assessment examines what candidates do as they write, the strategies they use and the decisions they make as student (academic) writers. The researcher successfully employed a list of important aspects of the paragraph writing test. Therefore, performance levels/errors were compared in terms of: (1) Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence, (2) Coherence - the logical flow of ideas; (3) Cohesion - proper use of transition words and connectors, (4) Paragraph development with the appropriate kind, appropriate level of details and with the appropriate pattern of development. (5) Accuracy of vocabulary and grammar, and (6) correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization and (7) legibility- readability. The focus of the test is more on accuracy of classroom writing.

Regarding rating, each student's result was calculated out of 50%, and then multiplied by 2 to convert to 100%. Finally, each candidate's total result was reduced to a 5-point scale. The

researcher controlled the correction and scoring of the whole candidates work with a single-eye inspection, took the rating task as his own responsibility. This was deliberately done because if two or more people were involved in the correction and scoring process, they might score same efforts on the candidates' paragraphs with different values. Hence, regardless of time consumption, one person scoring had helped to reduce scorer's bias and increased reliability and validity of the obtained results. The process of recording was made by the researcher and his assistant. Meanwhile, the students' paragraph writing performances were evaluated on the basis of National (Government's) Standards (MOE, n.d.)

Corresponding to the research questions that the study attempts to answer, the data were categorized under three basic research components as: (1) How do the paragraph writing performances of Grade 11 students in the target schools are compared? (2) How do teachers perceive their students' paragraph writing abilities? (3) Is there a significant difference in paragraph writing performance between Grade 11 students in   Jimma   and   in   Eldan Preparatory Schools? Quantitative data were calculated for 155 Jimma Preparatory School students and 73 Eldan Preparatory School students. This adds up to 228 paragraph test-takers. The comparison was made on seven (7) paragraph writing performance indicators for which explicit criteria were set on the basis of the aspects each indicator. As indicated in the methodology chapter, qualitative data were also collected from teachers through face-to-face interview. The data obtained through writing comprehension test were analyzed using the statistical techniques of mean, standard deviation and mean difference and t test, while the data collected via interview were analyzed qualitatively.

4.1.1. Paragraph Writing Abilities of Grade 11 Students in the Target Schools

As was previously mentioned the candidates test scores in writing effective paragraph on the given topic of writing was made in reference to the government (national) standard. Hence, the test scores were analyzed as:

> 90—100% = as Excellent
> 80—89% = as Very Good
> 70 --- 79 = Good

60---69% = as Satisfactory

50---59% = as Fair, and

Below 50% = as poor performance status respectively (obtained from Ministry of Education, METHOD OF MARKING, students' official report card, (n.d.)).

Analyzing students' writing problems is a valuable source of information concerning learners' strengths and weaknesses. Preliminary analysis of the data involved the separation and classification of errors to identify their types. Hence, (1) Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence, (2) Coherence - the logical flow of ideas, (3) Cohesion - proper use of transition words and connectors, (4) paragraph development with the appropriate kind and the appropriate level of details and with the right pattern of development, (5) language-correctness of vocabulary and grammar, (6) Correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization and (7) legibility- readability were analyzed from the students' paragraphs (data).

Government Standards were the bases for marking and ranking the students' achievement in paragraph writing test. Hence, this part of the analysis attempted to evaluate the results of the candidates paragraph in terms of pre-set criteria about marking the test score and results were compared with the standards from ''Excellent'' through ''poor'' as was set by the government for marking the students' achievement. The following two tables (Tables 1 and 2) show the overall paragraph writing abilities of students from the two schools with reference to the existing national bench-marks for scoring students' academic performances.

Table 1: Paragraph Writing Performance of Eldan Preparatory School Students with Reference to Government Standards

Seq. No.	Performance Indicators	Mean value	Percentage Score	Comparability with Government Standards
1st	Paragraph legibility- readability	4.11	82.2	Very Good
2nd	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	3.30	66.0	Satisfactory
3rd	Adequate development	3.24	64.8	Satisfactory
4th	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	3.10	62.0	Satisfactory
5th	Language: correctness of vocabulary an~~grammar~~	2.98	59.5	Fair
6th	Cohesion: proper use of transition words an connectors	2.61	52.2	Fair
7th	Correctness of punctuations and spellings	2.57	51.4	Fair

Table 2: Paragraph Writing Performance of Jimma Preparatory School Students with Reference to Government Standards

Seq. No.	Performance Indicators	Mean value	Percentage Score	Comparability with Government Standards
1st	Paragraph legibility- readability	3.89	77.8	Satisfactory
2nd	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	2.88	57.6	Fair
3rd	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	2.75	55.0	Fair
4th	Adequate development	2.57	51.4	Fair
5th	Language: correctness of vocabulary	2.36	47.2	Poor
6th	Cohesion: proper use of transition words an connectors	2.16	43.2	Poor
7th	Correctness of punctuations and spellings	1.94	38.8	Poor

First and for most, the majority of the students commonly exhibit higher degree of incompatibility in the use of punctuations and spellings. Despite this fact, the candidates of Eldan Preparatory schools showed a relative betterment in keeping compatibility with punctuations and spellings (average mean= 2.57) than their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School (Average Mean = 1.94). To this end, the later achieved the least paragraph writing performance in terms of all criteria for effective paragraph. With reference to the Government's standard indicators, the students' level of performance incompatibility of the

two target schools generally showed the least competence ranging from 'fair' to 'poor' for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively.

The next students' greater performance incompatibility was observed in terms of keeping proper paragraph cohesion and effective use of transition words. The student-writers' paragraphs revealed us with poorly connected sentences. Cohesive items played little importance to make the role of description as unified and meaningful paragraph. The connections of the students' paragraph were not adequately grounded in explicit linguistic elements. This could be explicitly observed from the corresponding values registered for Eldan candidates' with average mean =2.61 compared to relatively lower mean value corresponding to proper use of transition words and connectors for Jimma Preparatory candidates (average mean = 2.16). This can show the performance incompatibility of the students of the two schools referred from 'fair' to 'poor' in keeping proper cohesive devices with comparison to government standards.

According to the order of importance of the students' paragraph performance problems of the two preparatory schools, the next comparison area was language use, i.e., correctness of vocabulary and grammar. This assessment particularly subsumes fluency than a mere accuracy. High frequency of grammatical errors, lack of variety in grammatical structures employed, use of inappropriate grammatical structures, poor subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, run-ons, use of inappropriate vocabulary, limited range of vocabulary and misuses and redundancy of articles were found common problems of the students of the two preparatory schools despite the fact that the students of Eldan were relatively better in their language use (average mean = 2.98) than their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School (average mean = 2.57). Accordingly, the performance status of the candidates of the two schools with regard to correctness of vocabulary and grammar was lower as compared to the Government's bench-marks with 'fair' and 'poor' achievements for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively.

The forth important problem was analyzed for unity of the paragraph including topic sentence. The candidates of Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools showed significant variation in terms of keeping unity and adequate development in their paragraphs. For Eldan candidates keeping paragraph unity was less effectiveness area to strictly follow the topic sentence and to create a

unified paragraph (with average mean = 3.10). The quality of oneness of the idea and tightness with that of the main idea was made with little thought and a number of errors. Everything in the paragraph about *'The Sport Game I Like Most'* was inconsistently and insufficiently subordinated to and derived from the controlling idea in many of the student-writers' papers.

Meanwhile, the candidates of Eldan Preparatory School showed a relatively 'satisfactory' paragraph unity in their performance (average mean = 3.10) compared to their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School (average mean = 2.75), which was 'fair' achievement status as compared to the national performance standards. This reveals inadequate understanding of the unity and deficiency in clear self-expression pertinent to paragraph writing in the later group than the former group. Adequate development is the next challenge of the student-writers in Eldan Preparatory School (average mean = 3.24) while paragraph unity is an equivalent problem at this level for the student-writers in Jimma Preparatory School (average mean = 2.75).

Generally, the paragraphs of the candidates of the two schools remained back to keep full development of the idea for the reader. They kept with inadequate level of supporting details, and yet, readers cannot fully understand how the student-writers reached their conclusions. The student-writers showed little attempt to give sufficient information as to make the reader feel the topic sentence was sufficiently discussed. Specifically, better compatibility in maintaining paragraph development was recognized in the paragraph performance of Eldan candidates (with average mean = 3.24) compared to the effectiveness level in paragraph development showed by Jimma Preparatory candidates (with average mean = 2.57).

Coherence or the logical flow of ideas was the next equally serious problem for the student-writers of the two schools. With a considerable gap for performance incompatibility shown between the performers of the two groups, Eldan group have demonstrated their paragraph organized in a relatively better logical manner. They had shown better parallelism in their paragraph construction, used pronouns, transitional words and assumed orderly sequence to ensure smooth progression in their works compared to their peers in Jimma Preparatory School. With reference to the Government's standards, Eldan School candidates' paragraph coherence was generally scored as

"satisfactory" achievements (average mean = 3.30) compared to that of Jimma Preparatory candidates' paragraph coherence (average mean = 2.36), which was generally rated as '' fair'' performance status.

Among others, all of the candidates' paragraph performance compatibility in both schools was better understood from their efforts maintain to keep good legibility-readability. Most of the student-writers put their paragraphs with legible hand-writing. This increases interest for the reader to read it without any difficulty. The compatibility in legibility for Eldan Preparatory candidates is still better in relation to the overall standards of paragraph performance indicators (average mean = 4.11). Amongst all values observed in the students' level of performances the highest mean value, 'very good', was registered for legibility paragraph indicator by Eldan group. Therefore, the competence and confidence in legible writing seemed better as compared to their peer efforts in Jimma Preparatory School in terms of maintaining better legibility (average mean = 3.89), which is valued to a 'satisfactory level only. However, less discrepancy was registered in the values between the students of the two schools in terms of demonstrating the required level of paragraph legibility.

4.1.2. Comparison of Students' Paragraph Writing Abilities by Schools

One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain whether there were significant differences between the paragraph writing abilities of Grade 11 students across Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools. To this effect, data were analyzed using the statistical techniques of mean, standard deviation and mean difference. The following discussions focus on this issue. Table 3, below, shows the difference between paragraph performances between the two schools. The indicators ordered in the ascending order of importance of the obtained values. And the variation in mean and percentages (Figure 4) consistently show to what extent the paragraph performance status of Jimma Preparatory candidates' group perform lower than their competitors in Eldan. In other words, Eldan candidates' group performance status, in the available paragraph effectiveness indicators, is greater than their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School.

Table 3: Paragraph Writing Performance Differences across the Two Schools

		Performance indicators for good paragraph writing	CASE 1 (Jimma Preparatory)		CASE 2 (Eldan Preparatory)	
			Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
1		Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	2.75	1.181	3.10	.781
2		Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	2.88	1.102	3.30	.920
3		Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	2.16	1.018	2.61	.901
4		Adequate development	2.36	1.070	3.24	.965
5		Language: correctness of vocabulary and grammar	2.57	1.028	2.98	.911
6		Correctness of punctuations and spellings	1.94	.761	2.57	.991
7		Legibility- readability	3.89	.452	4.11	.059
		Overall mean	2.65	0.944	3.13	0.791

The candidates of Eldan Preparatory School kept with appropriate paragraph unity and topic sentence relatively better than that of the candidates of Jimma Preparatory School. This could be vividly observed from the mean and the standard deviation values registered on the above table. The mean value registered for Eldan Preparatory was 3.1 with the corresponding S.D = 0.781, while the mean value calculated for Jimma Preparatory was 2.75 with the corresponding S.D = 1.181. The higher S.D. value (1.181) for Jimma Preparatory school signifies that the candidates' ability in terms of keeping unity of the paragraph and topic sentence showed relatively greater degree of variation characteristic compared to the candidates of Eldan Preparatory School (.781).

In terms of keeping paragraph coherence, the candidates of the two schools still showed insignificant variation. This can be observed from the difference in the mean and the S.D. values calculated for the two schools. Eldan Preparatory School candidates kept coherence, the logical flow of ideas, in their paragraph with a mean value = 3.30 with a corresponding S.D = 0.920, while candidates of Jimma Preparatory School wrote coherently with average mean and S.D. calculated for 2.88 and 1.102 respectively. The S.D. value for Jimma Preparatory School is still greater (1.102), which could show that individual average performance characteristics deviated from the average mean value than their counter parts in Eldan Preparatory School.

- 62 -

Next, in terms of keeping paragraph cohesion, proper use of transition words and connectors, the two schools showed almost similar lower results. The mean value was 2.61 and 2.16 and corresponding S.D. values .901 and 1.018 for Eldan Preparatory and Jimma Preparatory School respectively. A relative ability difference for the proper use of transition words and connectors was observed with mean value = 0.45, which still indicates better capacity of students of Eldan School in keeping cohesion than their competent in Jimma Preparatory School. The higher degree of average deviation (1.018) also characterizes a relative lack of characteristic uniformity of the performers at Jimma Preparatory School and their competitors in Eldan Preparatory School.

Another insignificant variation was seen in the candidates' paragraph development. Achieving adequate paragraph development was one of the problems in which the candidates' ineffectiveness was revealed. Consequently, the mean result for adequate paragraph development was relatively better for Eldan School candidates (with average mean =3.24 with corresponding S.D. = .965) than their competitors in Jimma Preparatory (with average mean = 2.36 and a corresponding S.D. = 1.070). The mean difference for adequacy in paragraph development was calculated for 0.88, in which greatest mean difference was observed; yet the greater S.D. (1.07) could also be an indicator of relatively increased average deviation characteristic in Jimma Preparatory School candidates' performance as compared to their peers' in Eldan Preparatory School in terms of maintaining adequate paragraph development.

In terms of language use, correctness of vocabulary and grammar, the candidates of the two schools registered nearly similar results, high incompatibility with the standards were relatively common for both of the preparatory schools' candidates. This was vividly demonstrated from that of the candidates' performance value calculated for maintaining proper language use. Hence, the average mean and the corresponding S.D. values for Eldan Preparatory School were still better (with average mean = 2.98 and S.D. = .911) compared to their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School (with average mean = 2.57 and S.D. = 1.028). Although the candidates of the two schools showed relatively similar incompetence in proper language use, the mean difference was calculated for 0.41, indicating the betterment of Eldan candidates compared to candidates in Jimma Preparatory School.
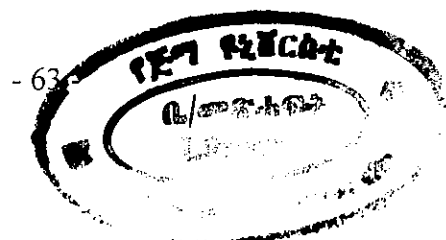
Another incompatibility was shown with regard to keeping correctness of punctuations and spellings. The results of the candidates of the two schools demonstrated below average mean values here too. The mean value for Eldan candidates was indicated with average mean = 2.57 and a corresponding S.D. = .991. The mean value registered for candidates of Jimma Preparatory School was with average mean = 1.94 with a corresponding S.D. = .761. The mean difference was 0.63, signifying the relative better potency of Eldan candidates. But greater inconsistency (deviation) characteristic in keeping correctness of punctuations and spellings was here shifted to Eldan candidates. This reveals the candidates' average performance deviation characteristic problem in maintaining proper punctuation was higher than their competent in Jimma preparatory.

Finally, the candidates, among other performance indicators, showed best compatibility in terms of meeting the rules of paragraph legibility or readability. Better competence was shown in the paragraphs of Eldan candidates (with average mean = 4.11 and S.D. = .059) than their peers in Jimma Preparatory School (with average mean = 3.89 and S.D. = .452). Compared to all other paragraph performance indicators, the candidates, both in the mean and the S.D. values indicated a slightly better performance in keeping paragraph legibility. The mean difference registered for legibility was 0.22, which indicates lowest variation between the candidates of the two preparatory schools.

In general, the overall mean values of the candidates showed variation about to keep the standards of good paragraph performance. The overall mean value for Eldan Preparatory School candidates was calculated to be 3.13 (62.6%) with the corresponding S.D. = 0.791, while the overall mean value for Jimma Preparatory School candidates was, 2.65 (53.0%) with the corresponding average S.D. = 0.944 and 0.791which reveals that the paragraph performance level of the candidates of the two schools in terms of keeping the standard rules of unity of the paragraph, coherence, cohesion, adequate development, language use, mechanics and legibility are within ''satisfactory'' and ''fair'' boundaries for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively, but not ''Very Good'' or ''Excellent'' ratings were observed. As compared from the obtained data in all paragraph performance aspects, the paragraph performance status of Eldan Preparatory School was relatively significant compared to their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School.

Comparing the paragraph writing performance of the two groups of students, we can see that Eldan candidates, regardless of merits they might individually or in group gain in-school or at home, they show relatively better paragraph performance achievement. Yet, never to say that their efforts were sufficiently installed to help them gain maximum competence and confidence out of writing effective paragraph.

Figure 4 : Line Graph Comparing Paragraph Performance Level of the Two Schools in terms of the Indicators

The above line graph also shows that the competence status of the two schools differs in all paragraph measures/ indicators. The paragraph performance level of Jimma Preparatory School candidates, throughout all the indicators, lied under the performance level of their equivalents at Eldan Preparatory School.
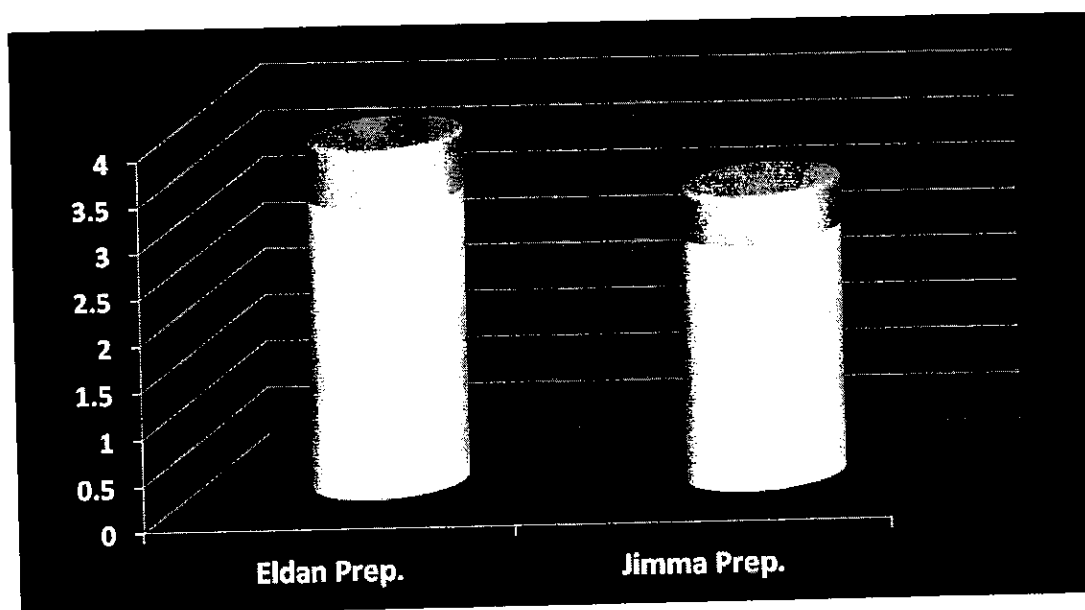
Figure 5: Bar-graph Comparing the Overall Performance Abilities of the Two Schools on Average Mean Ground

From Figure 5, above, we could clearly observe the paragraph performance differences the candidates of the two schools show. The graph was made on average mean (or percentile average) ground. While the total paragraph performance effectiveness level of Eldan Preparatory school students was on overall average mean = 3. 13 (or 62.6%), the corresponding overall average mean for Jimma Preparatory School students was 2.65 (or 53.0%). When this is compared with the Government Standards for students' exam performance, the general performance and competence level of Eldan Preparatory school students was observed at the lower margin of "Satisfactory" [60-79% = Satisfactory], and that of Jimma Preparatory School students was, only "Fair" [50-59% = Fair].

4.1.3. Levels of Statistical Significance Regarding Differences in Paragraph Writing between the Two Schools

4.1.3.1 One-Sample t-test Statistics and Analysis of Obtained Result

A one-sample t-test was run to determine whether the test score of the recruited students was different to normal, defined as a paragraph test value of 60%, "Satisfactory" - as the hypothesized

- 66 -

(expected) medium mean value, with 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference, and t-test value of $p <$ .05 taken to statistically significant. There were no outliers in the data, as assessed by inspection of a box plot. Under the t-test for Equality of Means column heading, one can look at the p-value under the Sig. (2-tailed) column. Then, if the p-value is less than .05, then one can recognize a statistically significant difference between the two independent groups on the outcome. Contrary to this, if the p-value is greater than .05, then we have a statistically less significant difference between our two independent groups on the outcome.

Table 4: One-Sample Statistics

	Performance Indicators	N	Mean	S. D.	S. Err. Mean
1	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	2	80.00	3.111	2.200
2	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	2	61.80	5.940	4.200
3	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	2	59.90	6.930	4.900
4	Adequate Development	2	56.70	7.495	5.300
5	Language: correctness of vocabulary and grammar	2	53.35	8.697	6.150
6	Correctness of Punctuations and spellings	2	47.70	6.364	4.500
7	Legibility- readability	2	45.10	8.910	6.300

Table 5: Result Obtained through One-Sample Test

	Performance Indicators	Test Value = 60%					
						95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	Lower	Upper
1	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	9.091	1	.070	20.000	-7.95	47.95
2	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	.429	1	.742	1.800	-51.57	55.17
3	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	-.020	1	.987	-.100	-62.36	62.16
4	Adequate Development	-.623	1	.645	-3.300	-70.64	64.04
5	Language: correctness of vocabulary and grammar	-1.081	1	.475	-6.650	-84.79	71.49
6	Correctness of Punctuations and spellings	-2.733	1	.223	-12.300	-69.48	44.88

Table 5: Result Obtained through One-Sample Test

	Performance Indicators	Test Value = 60%					
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Dif.	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
1	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	9.091	1	.070	20.000	-7.95	47.95
2	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	.429	1	.742	1.800	-51.57	55.17
3	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	-.020	1	.987	-.100	-62.36	62.16
4	Adequate Development	-.623	1	.645	-3.300	-70.64	64.04
5	Language: correctness of vocabulary and grammar	-1.081	1	.475	-6.650	-84.79	71.49
6	Correctness of Punctuations and spellings	-2.733	1	.223	-12.300	-69.48	44.88
7	Legibility- readability	-2.365	1	.255	-14.900	-94.95	65.15

The One-Sample T Test output was presented in Table 5 & 6. This output consists of two parts: One-Sample Statistics and One-Sample Tests. The One-Sample Statistics output presents the sample size (N), mean, standard deviation, and the standard-error-of-the-mean (the standard deviation divided by the square route of N) for each variable being tested. The One-Sample Tests output reports the t obtained, the degrees of freedom (df = n-1), the two tailed alpha level or level of significance (Sig.), and the difference between the sample mean and the population mean (Mean Difference: Sample Mean - Population Mean). This part of the output also reports a confidence interval for the mean difference. This confidence interval is the range of scores for which we are 95 % confident that it contains the true mean difference found in the sample population.

On the basis of the above premises, overall mean difference on the paragraph test performance scores, in ascending order of p-values for: (1) Unity $(p = 0.07)$; (2) Correctness of punctuations $(p = 0.223)$; (3) Legibility $(p = 0.255)$; (4) Language $(p = 0.475)$; (5) Adequate development $(p = 0.645)$; (6) Coherence $(p = 0.742)$; and (7) cohesion $(p = 987)$, all show the existing of statistically significant difference between the two independent groups on the outcome. Test of normality are all greater than p = 0.05 which imply that it is acceptable to assume that the weight distribution is

normal (or bell-shaped). Such a p-value indicates that the average weight of the sampled population is statistically significantly different from 60%, i.e., respective farness by ± from the hypothesized (population) mean.

This section of the table also shows the extent to which the mean differ each case, for each indicator. For instance, for Unity of the paragraph difference in the population means is 20.00, $t(9.091)$ and CI, 0.95 or (95% CI) of the difference are -7.95 to 47.95, lower to upper columns. This is, in fact, a greater difference. Second, for the Coherence paragraph indicator, difference in the population means is 1.8, $t(.429)$ and the 95% CI of the difference are -51.57 to 55.17, lower to upper columns. Next, for Cohesion of the paragraph indicator, difference in the population means is -.10, $t(-.02)$ and CI, 0.95 or (95% CI) of the difference are -62.36 to 62.16, lower to upper columns. Fourth in the table list was Adequate Development. For this indicator, difference in the population means is -3.3, $t(-.623)$ and CI, 0.95 or (95% CI) of the difference are -70.64 to 64.04, lower to upper columns, and so forth. Meanwhile, the mean difference lie between 20.00 and -14.9, which show a significant mean difference between the performance levels of the candidates of the two schools.

Generally, the 2-tailed (p-values), on CI= 0.95 or 95% confidence interval, tell us the existing statistically significant differences between the two independent groups. The most important differences between the two performer groups were recognized especially in keeping with paragraph cohesion $(p = 987)$, followed by keeping with paragraph coherence $(p = 0.742)$, then, maintaining adequate development $(p = 0.645)$ and in using proper language $(p = 0.475)$.

The next table, Table 7, could further explicitly and clearly show the performance differences and also the problems and challenges of the students according to the order of importance. Hence, the coming discussion attempts to provide a summary on the performance differences in the paragraph writing performance of the students of the two schools on the bases of minimum, maximum performance achievement and on average mean and S.Ds.

Table 6: Comparison of the Two Schools Scores

	Indicators	Min	Max	Mean	S. D.
1	Paragraph Legibility- readability	78	82	80.00	3.111
2	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	58	66	61.80	5.940
3	Adequate Development	55	65	59.90	6.930
4	Unity of the paragraph including topic	51	62	56.70	7.495
5	Language: correctness of vocabulary	47	60	53.35	8.697
6	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	43	52	47.70	6.364
7	Correctness of Punctuations and spellings	39	51	45.10	8.910

The above table shows minimum and maximum percentage scores. Throughout the entire columns, the minimum scores are referring Jimma Preparatory while the maximum, referring Eldan Preparatory students. From the above table, we could clearly observe the obtained average minimum and maximum test scores of the candidates of the two schools together with the corresponding average mean and S.Ds. for each paragraph performance indicator. The results, according to descending order of the values, revealed a mere adverse relationships existing between the obtained average mean score and the corresponding S.D. values, except, for one indicator, Paragraph Cohesion. That means, when the average mean scores for the indicators go down, the corresponding S.D. values more often move up. The increasing characteristics of the S.Ds are indicating the higher the performance deviation behavior of the two schools' students from the adjacent average mean scores. This, in return, may clear us the existence of student-writers in the two schools with a considerably higher variability in their paragraph writing ability or competence.

As far as the competence level of the students in the two schools is concerned, the students' paragraph writing abilities were not generally satisfying. The test results revealed that the students' performance standard was comparable only for paragraph legibility (error of lesser concern (*Freedman 1993*)). This is clear from the obtained average mean relatively nearer between the peer groups of the two schools (maximum = 82, for Eldan and minimum = 78, for Jimma Preparatory, respectively. Other obtained average maximum and average minimum scores consistently show

that the average paragraph performance competence/capacity of the Eldan group was greater than that of their peers at Jimma Preparatory school throughout all comparisons. As far as the Government's standard is concerned, comparison for legibility in terms of the overall efforts of the students were limited to "very good" and "satisfactory" achievement levels only. The dedication of the student-writers even in paragraph legibility plat form didn't get attained the most achievement, i.e., "Excellent" value.

Meanwhile, the most important paragraph performance indicators such as unity, coherence, cohesion, language, development, and correctness of punctuation and spelling were discovered as areas, the increasing number of the candidates' limitations and challenges commensurate. Many of these limitations are connected to "errors of greater concern" (*Freedman 1993*), and yet the students' performance abilities yield significantly lower and varied between the two schools. Comparing the general paragraph performance status of the two groups with the standard criteria, one can see that the general performance level of the students is below standard, The lowered overall mean of the two schools are evident in that the students of the two schools have been less competent in their paragraph writing performance.
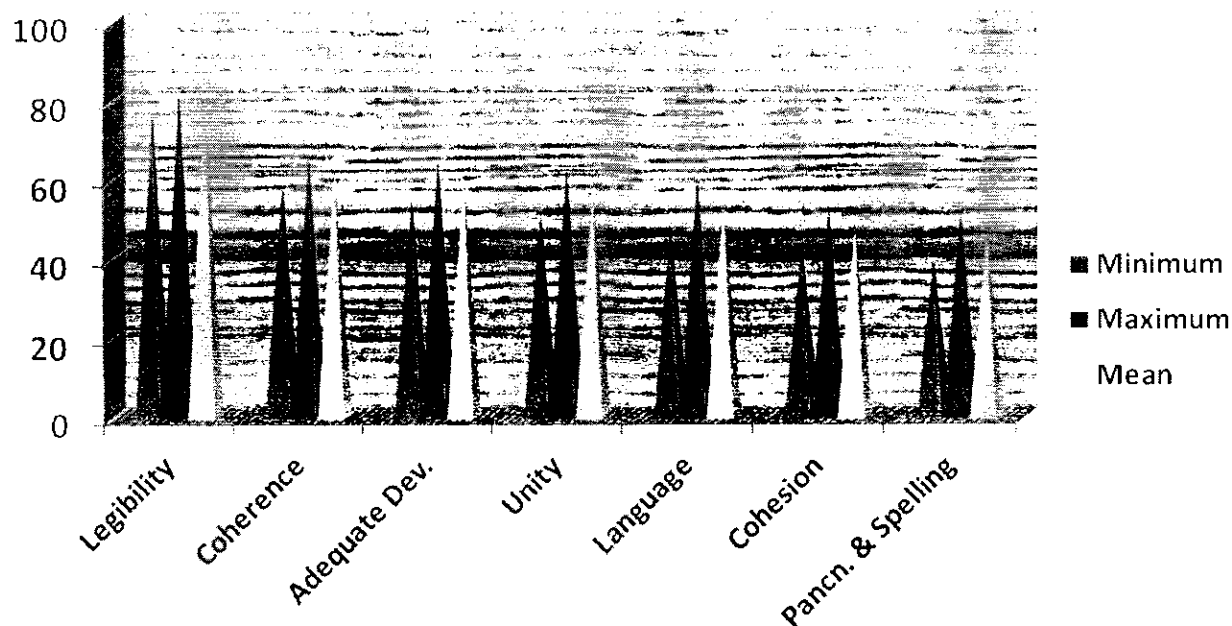
Figure 6: Bar-graph illustrating the minimum, maximum performances and percentage mean for the two schools

As summarized in the above bar-graph, compared to the mid-value "satisfactory" (*as to the reference point from the Government Standard, i.e., 60-79%*), the average percentage minimum values lied below 60%, in many cases. As such the maximum values didn't get stretched far from the mid, 60%. The grand average of the minimum and the maximum mean lies on 58%, which shows the overall performance status, according to the Government Standard for average performance, is under "satisfactory" exactly.

4.1.3.2: Level of Statistical Significance as Determined through t-test

Typical uses of a t-test for two independent samples might include testing for differences in test scores among students in two separate classrooms or the average response to a given stimulus for two study groups.

Table 7: Comparison of Statistical Significance with Mean, Mean- Difference and Standard
Deviation

Level	Performance Indicators	Comparison of statistical significance with Mean Mean difference and Standard Deviation		
		AV. Mean	Mean Dif.	S.D.
1	Language: correctness of vocabulary and grammar	53.35	-6.650	8.697
2	Correctness of Punctuations and spellings	45.10	-12.300	8.910
3	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors	47.70	-.100	6.364
4	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas	61.80	1.800	5.940
5	Adequate Development	59.90	-3.300	6.930
6	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence	56.70	20.000	7.495
7	Legibility- readability	80.00	-14.900	3.111

The mean difference, from higher to lower values correspond 20.0 for Unity; 1.80 for Coherence; -0.10 for Cohesion; -3.30 for Adequate Development; -6.65 for Language correctness; -12.30 for Correctness of Punctuation and Spelling; and the last, -14.90 for Legibility, in that order of importance respectively.

Comparison of statistical significance in terms of Standard Deviation was another tool which allows us to test whether the two sample means are significantly different from each other. In this regard, the students' paragraph performance behaviors were most scattered for correctness of punctuations and spellings and correctness of vocabulary and grammar, revealed with two relatively and almost equally largest S.Ds, 8.910 and 8.697 for the former and the later respectively. Next, statistically significant variables for test result scatterings were observed in three comparable areas. These were Unity of the paragraph (S.D. = 7.495); Adequate Paragraph Development (S.D. = 6.93); and Cohesion (S.D. = 6.36) from relatively higher to lower weight.

Generally, statistical significances were seen in two measurements, Mean difference and Standard Deviation, and results are significant to show the students' paragraph performance differences. With the average mean statistical measurement, results show that two sample means are significantly different from each other in paragraph indicators such as: Unity, Coherence,

- 73 -

Cohesion, Adequate Development, and Language correctness. The two groups' performance behavior on one discrete variable, say, Paragraph Unity, was shown with a significant variation. Similarly, on continuous variables consisting of a continuum of scores, the students' results revealed absolute difference or high degree of variability in the average means. Compared from S.D. values, generally high performance variations from the average mean scores were observed in two significantly weighing variables: correctness of punctuations and spellings and correctness of vocabulary and grammar; followed by Unity of the paragraph; Adequate Paragraph Development; and Cohesion.

The results from the paragraph writing test are indicative for the inadequacy of paragraph performances effectiveness amongst all the students of the two schools in general. And the discrepancy or performance gap of that of students of Jimma Preparatory students is lower than their competitors in Eldan Preparatory students in each and every criteria of paragraph indicator. This can reveal the need that the students require to improve their performances to be a good paragraph writer; and the more the support level that is required at Jimma Preparatory School.

4.1.4. Teachers' perceptions of students' paragraph writing abilities

The teaching-learning process and the teaching environment itself have very important impacts on creating and maintaining active, interactive and stimulating EFL writing classroom. The classroom should be a learning community where learners can enjoy the merit of sharing work in progress with other members of the class community striving to communicate in writing. This is the teacher's duty to try and create a supportive situation in which students develop their writing skills. In other words, teachers are important sources of information regarding their students' writing competence. With this understanding, this researcher attempted to get adequate information regarding English language teachers' perceptions on the students' paragraph writing abilities and problems related to their writing competence and confidence.

The first interview question forwarded for the English language teachers was how they have really found their students' paragraph writing ability. According to the personal view of individual interviewees, writing is not as such a smooth task because knowledge of the subject matter, the

- 74 -

students' early background is one of the major decisive factors to use the language effectively, employ words properly and write effective paragraphs. As most of the interviewees made it clear, there are only few students who attempt to show confidence and write with promising competence. They often explained that the majority of the students commit many errors in structuring sentences, developing paragraphs, using language, applying of mechanics and using correct cohesive devices. As far as the belief of the interviewees is concerned, since writing is a productive skill in which one has to generate thoughts, create ways of developing ideas and employ mechanisms to achieve unity and coherence, cohesion and appropriate grammar and vocabularies, writing is more challenging task for the majority of the students as compared to other macro and micro skills. The teachers expressed that most of the students dislike the writing skill, and as a result, are less effective in their writing. Therefore, the responses gained from the interviewed teachers indicate that these teachers perceive their students' paragraph writing ability as low.

The next interview question forwarded to the English language teachers was intended to elicit responses on how they evaluate their students' effectiveness in the writing class, and was also meant to know if the learners show commitment to do a lot in writing. In response, the interviewed teachers unanimously expressed that the degree of the students' effectiveness in paragraph writing is very low; except a few, their performances in many aspects of writing are generally below the requirements stated in the syllabus material. The students' ability in writing shows the students' performance problems. That means, paragraph writing is one of the areas the students perform with greater anxiety and errors,

The third interview question was stated as: "If you believe that the students are less effective (or totally ineffective) as desired in the curriculum, what do you think are the possible cause(s) for this inability?" According to the responses obtained from most of the interviewees, the reasons for the students' inability to write well enough to meet the required expectations are many and varied. As one of the interviewees explained, speaking and writing are both regarded as productive language skills requiring learners to produce the language they have learned. It is the communication of one's ideas to other people and the externalization and remaking of thinking. The response of this

informant implies that one of the factors that make writing difficult for students is the fact that it is a productive skill that involves high cognitive and linguistic skills at various levels.

The possible ineffectiveness factors, as supposed by majorities, were multi-dimensional. Many students never understood, first and for most, learning as their own responsibility. The students do not usually show commitment to take responsibility for their own learning through writing. Efforts yield more efforts and desired results. Regular attendance, regular performance, and a good deal of trial and error need to be the guiding principle of every classroom. As far as developing effectiveness in writing skill is concerned, the students require reading more and more, to take writing practices in school and at home and try it consistently. But many of the students don't do this regularly.

English, as a widely recognized universal language, if properly adequately practiced with the very interest, devotion and commitments to do a lot, it would help the students improve their communicative confidence and competence gradually developed. But the students' regular efforts are often missing in their inner driving forces, and in the surface of the classroom.

As one interviewee from Jimma Preparatory pointed out, without doubt, many factors, such as the teachers' negative impact and students' lack of interest in English, are responsible for the poor writing ability of many English language classrooms. Lack of adequate linguistic background, shyness, anxiety and fear of making errors, and learners' readiness or attitude to the target language are almost poor to maintain classroom motivation. It is often hard for English language teachers to sustainably enhance the students' attitudes in the writing classroom environment because of the learners' inadequate linguistic background.

Another teacher said that the students do not see the importance for them to learn what is being taught. Many students couldn't think that what they are learning in the writing class is useful for them in the future. Most of the students don't like what they are learning in the writing class. They do little to perform with written home works, and do not properly insist themselves to write after class study. When writing, they poorly try to connect the things they are writing about with what

they already know, and most of the time, many students write ineffective sentences and paragraphs keeping with the rules of spelling, capitalization and punctuation marks.

Another interviewee said that the students couldn't get adequate exposures for writing. Most of the time, we assess and evaluate the students' writing abilities in objective method. For me, grades should reflect students' effort and hard work that includes ''true'' writing. Multiple choice questions, as it has been an everlasting mechanism to assess the students' writing abilities and experiences, has little to contribute for the students to become effective writers. ''I am not very interested with my students' progress in the writing area'', he added.

In sum, it is important to remember that unless performance is relatively uniform on the subtests that make up a particular broad ability domain, the students' writing ability won't improve to gain the desired success as put in the syllabus material. Of the factors that influence students' learning, as the majority of the interviewees commented, is low motivation to write. The influence of students' background on learning has long been recognized as a cause for poor confidence and performance achievements. One interviewee pointed out that no single teacher accounts for all of a student's achievement.

The forth interview question was stated as ''In which aspect(s) of paragraph writing are your students especially weak?'' In their response, the interviewees pointed out that the students' knowledge about the main types of writing, i.e. descriptive, narrative, expository and persuasive writing is below the expectation. Poor language, vocabulary, punctuation are the very areas the students show inconsistency and accuracy. They never/or little bother about keeping oneness of the idea in their paragraph [unity], show less concern in maintaining coherence and connections. As the interviewees believed, the students' background knowledge to effectively equipping their paragraphs with topic sentence and supporting details is very little. One of the interviewees from Jimma Preparatory School explained that the students' knowledge and skill gap is not only related to perform effective paragraphs, but even many of the students' confidence and competence level in determining the type of extract, whether it is descriptive, narrative, expository or persuasive, have still been below the standard requirement.

- 77 -

This issue is critical because of the reason that identifying topic sentence from a given extract, determining the type of extracts whether it is descriptive, narrative, expository or persuasive, and placing proper punctuations in proper places are not only vital to assist them for effective writer. But also these components are areas of emphasis where the students will get challenged when they sit for University Entrance Exam after a year. As one interviewee from Eldan Preparatory School mentioned, the students' ability in arranging their ideas and feelings and using proper transitional words, grammar and vocabulary are serious shortcomings.

"Do you think the students' linguistic background is adequate to undertake different patterns of paragraph development, and with a reduced number of error that may possibly be committed in their paragraph structuring?" was the fifth question forwarded to the interviewees. In response, all of them expressed that the students' backgrounds are inadequate to write effective paragraphs, and for some, even effective sentences. According to one interviewee from Jimma Preparatory School, making complaints on the students' background seems to point one's finger at teachers of the previous grade levels, especially, the primary schools. He said that the background of the students is remarkably grated with the education policy all teachers are implementing right now. When they are given to write paragraph, they often mix all the parts, introduction, body and conclusion into one. Generally, all the interviewees expressed in that their students' linguistic background is a critical problem to effectively undertake effective paragraph writing using different methods of development and patterns of organization.

Finally, the interviewees were asked to explain how often they assess their students' paragraph writing performance, and to mention the feedback-giving mechanisms they frequently use to give students information about their paragraph writing outcomes. In answering this question, one of the interviewees emphasized that assessing students' writing is important. Accordingly, this interviewee reported that he often assesses his students' writing by giving them a topic to write a paragraph or two based on the issues they know well. However, he complained that the problems of inability and anxiety always come to affect most of the students' performance ability; students' reactions and interactions were very low during feedback process. This teacher tries to make writing experience-driven and dependent on the students' interests in whom he emphasizes process

- 78 -

and product approaches. And he follows timely, sustainable, and participatory feedback strategy. Raimes, (1991) argues that when a meaningful writing task is assigned to the students, they will put more thought and efforts into a piece of writing that communicate their ideas and opinions to the reader. In relation to assessment, students' confidence and competence are critical to create and make meaningful and continuous writing assessment.

Reacting to the above question, another teacher made it clear that he assesses students' finished composition only once a semester. Moreover, he couldn't provide a continuous assessment on writing and correct the outputs. He said that assessing and scoring every aspect of students' paragraph errors often create a cumbersome workload. In addition to assessing the product (composition), this teacher seems to give a summative written test at the middle or end of the semester. Continuous assessment and related feedback mechanisms were critical concerns, but lacked significant attention by this teacher. This teacher applies a pen-and-paper feedback strategy only once a semester. This teacher obviously uses product approach over process approach in the writing classroom. Traditional summative assessment attempts to summarize students' learning at some point in time, say the end of a course, but cannot provide the immediate, contextualized feedback useful for helping teachers and students during the learning process. Furthermore, assessment and evaluation must be viewed as integral, planned parts of the writing curriculum. Students need to be actively and frequently involved with the teacher in the process of writing from planning stage of the writing activities through assessment of the students' writing outputs.

In response to the same question, the other teacher revealed that he tests students' writing performance at each chapter, but he takes only four to five samples of students' compositions to correct in the class. The sentences that are not grammatically correct in the sample compositions are often discussed together in class. From samples of ungrammatically correct sentences, the students are expected to be able to produce grammatically correct sentences when they are assigned to write another composition. In short, correction on samples of students' composition serves as feedback in the form of whole-class feedback and it seems process approach that dominates the writing classroom. In this case, the teacher could not provide individual feedback.

To sum up, a few teachers show commitments in area of providing the students with continuous assessments and show strong undivided concern to emphasize on process approach over product approach of writing; and provide their students with timely, persistent and participatory feedback. Some fear the work-loads writing assessment poses on their time, energy and effort, and rarely provide writing assessment; involve in product approach over the process. They seldom provide comprehensive and inclusive feedback. Others engage in both process and product approaches of writing; and made writing assessments chapter after chapter, but hung feedback on the efforts of very few writing outputs.

Lee & Kelly (2012) asserts that if students are not given a reword or credit for their efforts, and no feedback is given to the student, then most students' motivation would begin to decrease. Students should be always encouraged to write and express themselves on subjects of their interest. Students need to know that the writing process is difficult. Only through practice can students make the inevitable errors and learn to engage in the process of negotiating meaning through different stages. Involving learners in their own writing assessment would be motivating for them and will increase learner involvement in aspects of the learning experience which is highly beneficial. Teachers, who want to help their students gain confidence in writing, should try to follow a writing process that takes the student from insecurity to success (Bartholomae, 1995).

Generally, from the interviews made with English language of the two schools, this researcher gained relevant pieces of information. As most of the interviewees made it clear, there are only few students who attempt to show confidence and write with promising competence. From the teachers' common consent, the majority of the students commit many errors in structuring sentences, developing paragraphs, using language, applying of mechanics and using correct cohesive devices. Their performances in many aspects of writing are below the requirements stated in the syllabus material.

The reasons for the students' inability to write well enough to meet the required expectations were many and varied. The students do not usually show commitment to take responsibility for their own learning through writing. Many students couldn't think that what they are learning in the

- 80 -

writing class is useful for them in the future. The students' regular efforts are often missing in their inner driving forces, and in the surface of the classroom.

One interviewee said that the test and exam trends have been one and the same in formative and summative evaluations, including the national assessment. Multiple choice questions have been the very tool in assessing the students' knowledge and understanding, and have little to contribute for the students to become effective writers. It doesn't encourage the students to do a lot in school and at home. It usually insists the students for loss of confidence, and leads the students for test and exam cheating.

Teachers' negative impact and students' lack of interest in English are responsible for the poor writing ability of many English language classrooms. It is often hard for English language teachers to sustainably enhance the students' attitudes in the writing classroom environment because of the learners' inadequate linguistic background. The interviewees pointed out that the students' knowledge about the main types of writing is below the expectation. Poor language, vocabulary, punctuation are the very areas the students show inconsistency and accuracy. They never/or little bother about keeping unity of the idea in their paragraph and show less concern in maintaining coherence and connections. And yet, many of the students' confidence and competence level in determining the type of extract, whether it is descriptive, narrative, expository or persuasive, have still been below the standard requirement, which have lasting effect against their effectiveness in their University Entrance Exam. The teachers' attitude on the writing classroom was generally negative and full of complaint.

4.2. Discussion

The study was designed to test the paragraph performance competence of two preparatory school students. The overall paragraph writing abilities of students from the two schools were compared with reference to the existing Government Standards for scoring students' academic performances. General criteria for conducting the paragraph test and assessing their performance level were set. Standard indicators, with proposed values for each, were set in order to objectively score the candidates' achievements in the paragraph writing test. These were: unity of the paragraph including topic sentence; coherence – the logical flow of ideas; cohesion – proper use of transition

words and connectors; paragraph development with the appropriate kind, the appropriate level of details and with the appropriate pattern of development; language-correctness of vocabulary and grammar; correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization; and paragraph legibility-readability.

This assessment particularly emphasizes on fluency than a mere accuracy. Among others, all of the candidates' paragraph compatibility in both schools was better understood from their efforts to maintain quality keep good legibility-readability. Most of the student-writers put their paragraphs with legible hand-writing. This increases interest for the reader to read it without any difficulty. The compatibility in legibility for Eldan Preparatory candidates was better in relation to the overall standards of paragraph performance indicators (82% : 72%).

Amongst all values observed in the students' level of performance the highest mean value, 'very good', was registered for legibility paragraph indicator by Eldan group. Eldan Preparatory School English language teachers, from the interview and personal experience, show good curiosity to see legibility in the students writing. The majority of the students commonly exhibit higher degree of disperity in the use of punctuations and spellings. Despite this fact, the candidates of Eldan Preparatory School showed a relative betterment in keeping good pace with punctuations and spellings than their counterparts in the Jimma Preparatory. Another lack of effectiveness was observed in terms of keeping proper paragraph cohesion and effective use of transition words. The student-writers' paragraphs revealed poorly connected sentences. Cohesive devices played little importance to make the role of description as unified and meaningful paragraph.

Obtained results clearly demonstrated that high frequency of grammatical errors, lack of variety in grammatical structures employed, use of inappropriate grammatical structures, poor subject-verb agreement, sentence fragments, run-ons, use of inappropriate vocabulary, limited range of vocabulary and misuses and redundancy of articles were found common problems of the students of the two preparatory schools despite the fact that the students of Eldan were relatively better in their language use (average mean = 2.98) than their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School.

4.2.1 Errors Found in the Data

One of the most common difficulty areas for many of the student-writers in the target schools was, in fact, the proper application of punctuations and spellings. Most of the student-writers commit errors in punctuation related to the omission or improper application mainly of comma. Language errors frequently observed in the candidates' paragraphs were cited here under with few examples extracts.

4.2.1.1 Verbs

The students have difficulty in understanding the notion of a frame of time. In the data, there were many cases demonstrating the abuse of verb tenses and aspects in the candidates' English. They had a hard time selecting the appropriate verb form. Tense and aspect errors were due to the substitution of one tense/ aspect for another. Present Simple, Progressive and perfect aspects are especially difficult for the learners. Although present simple is the simplest and commonly used tense for variety of descriptions and explanations, this researcher has recognized that an increasing number of the student-writers have not well acquainted with the notion when and how to apply this simplest form.

Hence, the following 10 extracts are taken from the student-writers' paragraphs (5, from Eldan and the remaining 5, from Jimma Preparatory) to exemplify misuses of grammar, and errors in vocabulary and spellings.

> ''I was very disappointed of what I have seen there and very annoyed of what I found''
> (Student no. 8, Eldan).
> ''I was liked watching and to play foot game than other sport'' (Student no. 12, Eldan).
> ''I am like to play tennis table'' (Student no. 25, Eldan).
> ''I am wanting to make myself favorite international footballer'' (Student no. 44, Eldan).

> ''Swiming is I like best sport'' (Student no. 72, Eldan).

> ''There are many size and style pooling of and billiard tables'' (Student no. 13, Jimma Preparatory).

> ''Chances has been great for me will be basket ball player'' (Student no. 66, Jimma Preparatory).

> ''My love is not game of sport I apreshate comentators''(Student no. 79, Jimma Preparatory).

> ''I like first of all indoor game playing chese''(Student no. 109, Jimma Preparatory).

4.2.1.2 Fragments:

A fragment is a group of words that does not form a complete sentence. A sentence fragment is a group of words that does not express a complete idea, and cannot make sense on its own. To complete it, additional information needs to be added. Some students had problems with fragments:

Exs. ''May be see the young people so i want to be like football'' (Student no. 77, Jimma Prep.).

''Went to stadium'' (Student no. 26, Eldan).

4.2.1.3 Run-on sentence:

A run-on sentence has group of words that should be complete sentence, but they are combined into long sentence without punctuation. A run-on sentence occurs when two independent clauses (of two complete thoughts) are blended into one without proper separation. Some of the student-writers commit error for run-on sentences.

Exs. ''I usually go to the cinema house with my friend we watched a foot ball arts'' (Student no. 5, Eldan).

'' I enjoy soker [soccer] more than every sport I will become very happy during I watch it (Student no. 95, Jimma Preparatory).

The paragraphs of the candidates of the two schools remained back to keep full development of the idea for the reader. They kept with inadequate level of supporting details, and yet, readers cannot fully understand how the student-writers reached their conclusions. The student-writers showed little attempt to give sufficient information as to make the reader feel the topic sentence was sufficiently discussed. Coherence or the logical flow of ideas was another equally serious problem for the student-writers of the two schools.

One of the objectives of the study was to ascertain whether there were significant differences between the paragraph writing abilities of Grade 11 students across Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools. To this effect, data were analyzed using the statistical techniques of mean, standard deviation and mean difference. In general, the overall mean values of the candidates showed variation about to keep the standards of good paragraph performance. The overall mean value for Eldan Preparatory School candidates was calculated to be 3.13 (62.6%) with the corresponding S.D. = 0.791, while the overall mean value for Jimma Preparatory School candidates was, 2.65 (53.0%) with the corresponding average S.D. = 0.944 and 0.791which reveals that the paragraph performance level of the candidates of the two schools in terms of keeping the standard rules of unity of the paragraph, coherence, cohesion, adequate development, language use, mechanics and legibility are within ''satisfactory'' and ''fair'' boundaries for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively, but not ''Very Good'' or ''Excellent'' ratings were observed. As compared from the obtained data in all paragraph performance aspects, the paragraph performance status of Eldan Preparatory School was relatively significant compared to their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School.

Comparing the paragraph writing performance of the two groups of students, we can see that Eldan candidates, regardless of merits they might individually or in group gain in-school or at home, they show relatively better paragraph performance achievement. Yet, never to say that their efforts were sufficiently installed to help them gain maximum competence and confidence out of writing effective paragraph. Language learning occurs most effectively as part of an "interactive cycle of teaching and learning" which includes modeling of the target text by the teacher, co-production of

an instance of the target text by teacher and student (scaffolding), and finally independent production of the target text by the student (Freedman, 1993).

In fact teachers cannot expect weak writers to improve simply by equipping them with the strategies of good writers. Teachers need to explore ways of scaffolding students' learning and using knowledge of language to guide them towards a conscious understanding of target genres and the ways language creates meanings in context.

A one-sample t-test was run to determine whether the test score of recruited students was different to normal, defined as a paragraph test value of 60%, ''Satisfactory'' - as the hypothesized (expected) medium mean value - with 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference, and t-test value of $p < .05$ taken to statistically significant.

Generally, the 2-tailed (p-values), on CI= 0.95 or 95% confidence interval, showed that existing of statistically significant differences between the two independent groups. The most important differences between the two performer groups were recognized especially regarding paragraph cohesion $(p = 987)$, followed by keeping with paragraph coherence $(p = 0.742)$, then, maintaining adequate development $(p = 0.645)$ and in using proper language $(p = 0.475)$. In this particular cases the writing performance of the two groups showed insignificant variation compared to the Government standards for marking students' results.

As far as the Government's standard is considered, the competence level of the students in the two schools in paragraph writing abilities was not generally satisfying. The test results revealed that the students' performance standard was comparable with the standard only for paragraph legibility (error of lesser concern). This is clear from the obtained average mean relatively nearer between the peer groups of the two schools (maximum = 82%, for Eldan and minimum = 78%, for Jimma Preparatory) respectively. Other obtained average maximum and average minimum scores consistently show that the average paragraph performance competence/capacity of the Eldan group was greater than that of the students at Jimma Preparatory School, throughout all comparisons.

- 86 -

Comparison of statistical significance in terms of Standard Deviation was another method employed to test whether the two sample means are significantly different from each other. In this regard, the students' paragraph performance scores which most scattered for correctness of punctuations and spellings and correctness of vocabulary and grammar, revealed with two relatively and almost equally largest S.Ds, 8.910 and 8.697 for the former and the later respectively. Next, statistically significant variables for test result scatterings were observed in three comparable areas. These were unity of the paragraph (S.D. = 7.495); adequate paragraph development (S.D. = 6.93); and cohesion (S.D. = 6.36) from relatively higher to lower weight.

Generally, mean differences are significant to show the students' paragraph performance differences. With the average mean statistical measurement, results show that two sample means are significantly different from each other in paragraph indicators such as: unity, coherence, cohesion, adequate development, and language correctness. The results from the paragraph writing test are indicative for the inadequacy of paragraph performances effectiveness amongst all the participants of the two schools in general. This was clearly seen from the grand average performance level of the two schools (58%), which was below ''satisfactory'', on the Government Standard. And the discrepancy or performance gap of the students of Jimma Preparatory is lower than their competitors in Eldan Preparatory School in each and every criterion of paragraph indicator, by nearly 10%. This can reveal the need and the special attention English language teachers should give towards the students' improvement on paragraph writing as to be a good paragraph writer; and the more the support level that is required at Jimma Preparatory School.

As most of the interviewees made it clear, there are only few students who attempt to show confidence and write with promising competence. According to the teachers' interview, many students could not think that what they are learning in the writing class is useful for them in the future. The students' regular efforts are often missing in their motivation, and practices done in the classroom. Teachers' lowered attitude to help the students perform well and continuously in the writing class, and students' lack of interest in English are responsible for the poor writing ability of many students. It was often hard for English language teachers to sustainably enhance the students' attitudes in the writing classroom environment because of the learners' inadequate linguistic

background. Only few teachers show commitments in providing the students with process writing as well as continuous assessments; and still show strong and regular attention to render the students with timely, persistent and participatory feedback. Some fear the work load writing assessment poses on them, energy and effort, and rarely provide writing assessment and involve in related feedback interactions. Others engage in providing writing assessments chapter after chapter, but hung feedback on the efforts of very few writing outputs.

Self- and peer assessment mechanisms are rarely utilized in the writing classes. ''Self-assessment provides a suitable interface between feedback, self-reflection, and increased autonomous learning, enabling both learner and teacher to reflect on the learning process and to give or receive mutual feed-back'' (Noels, 2000). On the other hand, multiple choice questions, as it has ever been a sustaining mechanism to assess the students' writing abilities and experiences has limited the teachers' effort to search for seeking for alternative ways in assessing the students' knowledge and understanding, and has little to contribute for the students to become effective writers.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The purpose of this research was to compare the students' paragraph writing performance between Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools. In order to make the comparison of the preparatory students writing performance effective, the researcher had focused on three important and inseparable components. These were: (A) the basic research questions- (1) How do the paragraph writing performances of Grade 11 students in the target schools are compared? (2) Is there a significant difference in paragraph writing performance between Grade 11 students in Jimma and in Eldan Preparatory Schools? (3) How do teachers perceive their students' paragraph writing abilities? (B) Selecting and setting seven standard indicators for evaluating the students' paragraph test, using paragraph unity, coherence, cohesion, development, language, mechanics and paragraph legibility; and (C) borrowing the Government's standard indicators for marking the achievement level of the test candidates. The researcher, using paragraph test and teachers' interview methods for gathering relevant data and with the help of various statistical tools (percentage, mean, SD, and t-test) analyzed and compared the students' paragraph writing abilities.

Results showed that the paragraph ability of the two schools did not show significant difference as compared to the Government's standards. The students' paragraph writing ability was better compared in the legibility paragraph indicator (error of lesser concern). The comparability of the students' paragraph performance throughout the rest of standard indicators lied between ''satisfactory'' (60-79%) and ''fair'' (50-59%) values for Eldan Preparatory School and Jimma Preparatory School respectively. Teachers' perceptions to their writing classrooms were not pleasant. Lack of attention about to emphasizing on process than product approach of writing, the potential influence posed by assessment and evaluation strategy (Objective type-multiple-choice item over subjective items-paragraph and composition writing), poor feedback trend, and poor incentive mechanisms were teachers' related problems. And the students' background of the

language as well as their readiness to make learning writing as own responsibility were some of the striking challenges of the writing classes.

5.2 Conclusion

This research focuses on writing performance in EFL writing focusing on comparison of Grade 11 classes of two preparatory schools, Jimma and Eldan. The purpose was to assess the paragraph writing performance status of students in the two schools based on seven paragraph performance standards, and compare the similarities/differences of the effectiveness of the students on fluency basis. The data were collected from 235 candidates sampled from the two schools (160 from Jimma Preparatory and 75 from Eldan Preparatory School). Using Systematic Random Sampling method for the students and Extreme Case Sampling method for the teachers, this researcher determined the sample students and teachers from Jimma and Eldan Preparatory Schools. The researcher employed data tools, a short paragraph test and teachers' interview to gather relevant data.

The paragraph performance level of the candidates of the two schools compared from ''satisfactory'' to ''fair'' values for Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools respectively, but no ''Very Good'' or ''Excellent'' rating was observed to say the students' paragraph is salient to effectiveness. So far the competence level of the students in the two schools is not generally satisfying. As compared from the obtained data in the majority of paragraph performance aspects, the paragraph performance status of Eldan Preparatory School students was relatively significant compared to their competitors in Jimma Preparatory School. The test results revealed that the students' performance was good only for paragraph legibility (error of lesser concern) in comparison with nationally set standards.

The results from the paragraph writing test are indicative for the inadequacy of paragraph performances effectiveness amongst all the students of the two schools in general. This was clearly seen from the grand average performance level of the two schools lied on 58%, which was below ''satisfactory'', by the rule of the Government Standard. And the performance gap that existed between the two schools was as such not highly significant, about 10%.

- 90 -

As could be seen from the analysis, the students' performance errors are systematic and classifiable. Grammatical complexity is the aspect shown as one of the vital differences from the standard comparison, but insignificant compared to the achievements of the two groups. The students of the two schools persistently commit grammatical errors in tense use, fragments, run-ons, dangling modifiers, subject-verb agreement errors, etc. The students' result also showed the insignificant difference between the two groups for the three variables: linguistic accuracy, coherence and cohesion. This, in turn, implies that both teachers and learners must see errors as the key to understanding and solving accuracy problems in English writing classes. Then, it is the teachers' responsibility to adopt, modify or even develop remedial procedures that can elevate the students' level and minimize their errors. Teachers should try to find appropriate methods to deliver the writing lesson to their students. Therefore, teachers are expected to regularly apply different methods that are suitable for the students' needs, interests and abilities.

The information obtained from the teachers showed that many students could not think that what they are learning in the writing class is useful for them in the future. The students' regular efforts are often missing in their inner motivation, and in the efficacy they show in the writing classroom. Teachers' lack of interest and proper attention in creating, maintaining and sustaining an entertaining and a supportive writing classroom, and students' poor language background as well as lack of interest against English writing are responsible for the unsatisfactory writing performance and competence of the observed schools' English language writing classrooms. Due this fact, almost all teachers often set objective item questions at the expense of free writing. In reality, the mere intention on multiple – choice items is always insisting the learners for blind guess and plagiarism, and compared to free-writing strategy, it has its disadvantages – preventing the students from brainstorming, planning, writing, revising, and rewriting their paragraphs and compositions until they get sound and meaningful for the readers. Mean while teachers' couldn't endeavor to create and maintain techniques and strategies that may insist the learners to do better in the writing class, they rarely encourage them for peer-based performance and self assessment that may loosen their energy and strengthen the students' motivation and collaborative learning. Had it been supportive to loosen the teachers' stress, and supply the students with motivation and

interest for doing collaboratively and learn to comment each other. [*This issue may trigger an interest for future research*].

The teachers' attitude against their students' paragraph performance interest and ability was referred in the interview as very low. It was often hard for the English language teachers to sustainably enhance the students' attitudes in the writing classroom environment because of the learners' inadequate linguistic background. Only few teachers show commitments in areas providing the students with peer learning, continuous and self-assessments, choosing process approach over product approach of writing, and still showing strong and undivided attention to provide the students with timely, persistent and participatory feedback in the writing class.

From past researches, process writing - as distinguished from product writing (as to Wyrica, 1997) is playing a large role in ESL classes. Writing is seen as a communicative act with an intended purpose and audience. The teacher and other learners help the writer find a topic and revise drafts of a written piece until it conveys the intended meaning. Patricia, (1992) says; the key to successful writing classes is that they are realistic in nature targeting the skills required or desired by students. Students need to be personally involved in order to make the learning experience of lasting value. Encouraging student participation in the exercise, while at the same time refining and expanding writing skills, requires a certain pragmatic approach. The teacher should be clear on what skills he/she is trying to develop.

Correcting students' writing is a time-consuming work; therefore, many teachers dislike correcting students' writing. The goal of writing classes, however, is to promote learners performance in writing accurately across different genres. This requires explicit instruction on many items such as grammar, punctuation, spelling, structure, style as well as on generating and expressing ideas (Brualdi, 2002). For the effectiveness of teaching writing in the context of ELT in high [preparatory] schools, aspects that need to be improved are: (1) the design of writing tasks suggested by the competence based curriculum, (2) the design of constructivist/process approach in teaching writing, and (3) the use of various kinds of assessment procedures in teaching writing (Brualdi, 2002).

- 92 -

5.3 Recommendations

Recognizing the critical role EFL writing can and will play in the students' communicative confidence and academic competence; on the accounts of summary of findings and conclusions summarized above; and on the building blocks of literary grounds, this researcher wants to emphasize on the following few feasible performance improvement premises in this last section. How to improve our students' ability in English in general and in academic writing in Particular, is an important question because academic writing is a severe problem. Many students are not taught how to write academically even in their first language. In fact, many preparatory students are weak in own vernacular writing let alone in writing English.

> *Undivided attention should be given for improving students' linguistic errors*: Students' grammatical errors in the Writing classes should be discussed in departmental meetings; to share and internalize common experiences, comments, concerns and commitments on the most significant students' writing problems and to set strategies to help the students learn from their errors and gradually improve their writing out puts. It should be clear here that there is no one answer to the question of how to teach writing in ESL classes. Surveying the related literature proved that there are as many answers as there are teachers and teaching methods and styles as well as learners and learning styles. Learners should be always encouraged to do remedial exercises. In fact, ability to write or communicate cannot be fulfilled unless the grammar is there, in the competence of the writer (Campbell & Nancy, 1997).

> *Challenging the writing classroom challenges*: Motivation and attitude are not only related to the learners but to the teacher him/herself. Teaching writing needs very devoted teachers. The teachers' readiness and motivation itself could and will deter their effectiveness in creating, maintaining and sustaining interesting classroom strategies that make the writing a fun. Meticulous attention should be given for English language teachers to engage them adequately in the professional arena. They need to gain information and experiences learned from around the web, on how to challenge the challenges of the writing

- 93 -

classes. Preparatory and high school English language teachers' prior responsibility is to search for veteran experiences veritable to solve their own writing classroom challenges. There are also a number of sources that help the teachers gain significant benefits. Small panels, workshops and seminars that may harmonize them with facet and abreast strategies, approaches and methods of writing would have their own merits to improve their teaching, assessment and evaluation strategies. To that end, Woreda Education and Jimma University, with its experts, can surpass on and appeal to English departments' prioritized problems to improve the status-quo.

➢ *Motivating the learners at the center of writing classroom*: A teacher can do a lot to improve the students' motivation and the effort involved is an essential part of the teaching profession and will enhance learning process. Teachers are playing the most important role not only in teaching, but also in motivating the students. This is the teacher's duty to create, maintain and sustain. They can prepare student competitions in writing, use mini-media and bulletin boards, pen- pal and other suitable mechanisms to arise the students' interest for writing. They should always remember that writing is an individual effort and skill, therefore, the teacher's role is to share in the process by offering constructive criticism as well as correcting errors.

➢ *Mainstreaming writing with other macro and micro-skills:* It is always helpful to encourage students to use different activities and strategies to improve their writing. If writing is limited only to writing class, then, the students will have insufficient practical writing experience. Consequently, writing needs to be encouraged and assessed as part of all the other English skills students take. Thus, various writing activities are important elements in teaching writing. Therefore, it is suggested that all linguistics and literature sub-skills should demand a piece of writing, Since the only way to learn writing is to write, then our students should be writing every day because there are different types of writing or writing tasks.

➢ *Choosing process approach over product approach of writing*: Many EFL programs use a process approach to writing instruction, and some regularly publish collections of learners writing. Process writing - as distinguished from Product Writing is playing a large role in ESL classes. A writing process checklist should include characteristic activities and considerations for each stage of the writing process, from gathering and organizing ideas during prewriting, to publishing compositions in the last stage. Students use the checklist to monitor their movement through the writing process.

➢ *Assessment, evaluation and feedback Strategies*: Tactful correction of students writing is essential. It is always helpful to have different strategies when responding to errors found in students' writing. Some of these are Direct/Indirect Feedback, Global/ local Errors/ and treatable /Untreatable errors. Also, learners' errors which are repetitive should be put as samples on the board and then students should be asked to correct the errors. Error analysis could be the core of the writing class. Correction and grading are very important for both teachers and learners. They show students whether they are making progress and in what aspects. They also encourage them to take things seriously and at the same time provide students with definite goals to attain. For teachers, on the other hand, they show them whether their teaching procedures are appropriate or not. They help them to discover the students' weaknesses and strengths in order to tackle them seriously.

➢ *Subjective items should be included in summative exams*: Effective assessment requires a clearly defined purpose. Thus, teachers must ask themselves several important questions: What am I trying to assess? What do my pupils need to know? What type of knowledge is being assessed: reasoning, memory, or process. Multiple choice questions, as it has been an everlasting mechanism to assess the students' writing abilities and experiences, has little to contribute for the students to become effective writers. Objective items usually insist the students to do exams simply on a blind guess and encourage cheating and plagiarism. Not only in English language, but also in all subjects teachers need to include subjective items, at least in a couple of sentences. English language teachers better to do this in short paragraphs and emphasize on the students' errors using correction rubrics.

➢ *Setting effective evaluation criteria*: Evaluating EFL students' writing is not an easy thing and sometimes as teachers we are not able to grade students' written assignments using

- 95 -

appropriate evaluation criteria. So, it is common that some of our students feel frustrated about the results of their compositions. We need to know that the evaluation results are not going to be perfect, but as language teachers we can find different instruments and ways to grade more accurately considering the students' needs. On the other hand, teachers may need to offer more encouragement and positive feedback. Appropriate, timely and sustaining feedback for the students' performance should get the undivided attention of the teachers in the writing class.

➢ *Implementing self assessment and self-reflection:* Implementation of self assessment in the EFL writing classroom has a significant effect on improving EFL English writing abilities. It was found that gains in knowledge and improvement of writing abilities tended to be larger with the implementation of self assessment in the writing classrooms. Self assessment and other self-reflective activities usually require learners to grade their peers or their own performance, based on clearly defined task requirements and assessment criteria.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Paragraph Writing Test

JIMMA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

MA IN TEFL PROGRAM

Paragraph Writing Test Administered to a Sample of Grade 11 Students in Eldan and Jimma Preparatory Schools

Dear Students,

This test is intended to check your paragraph writing performance. The result will be kept confidential and used for a research purpose only. If you are willing to take the test, kindly put your signature below and start working on the test based on the instruction.

Thank you for willingness to take the test.

Put your signature here:_____

Instruction: Do you like sport games?_____

Which sport game do you like most?_____

Write a paragraph (not more than 200 words) explaining the sport game you like it.

The Sport game I Like Most

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PARAGRAPH WRITING TEST

General Procedure for Conducting Paragraph Test

1. **The purpose of paragraph performance test**: to make comparison on performance level between Grade 11 students of the two target schools, Jimma and Eldan Preparatory.

2. **Topic of paragraph writing**: The sport Game I Like Most

3. **Paragraph development style**: Descriptive.

4. **Paragraph length** (word-count): not greater than 200 words.

5. **Performance level**: individual level paragraph writing performance.

6. **Required writing skill (bench-mark):** both grammatical accuracy and fluency in the formation of paragraph that includes language skills and the skills of organizing ideas. The type of knowledge and understanding that is being assessed in the paragraph test is descriptive writing.

7. **Assessment strategy**: performance based assessment of paragraph.

- Performance-based assessment is integrated with instructional process.
- Process assessment examines what candidates do as they write, the strategies they use, and the decisions they make as a student (academic) writer.
- Three measures of process assessment that needs to be introduced for the stakeholders (student-writers and collaborating teachers). These are: writing-process check list; student-teacher assessment conference; and self-assessment (paragraph test) by the candidates (adopted from *Canale & Swain, 1990).*
- Candidates use the check-list to monitor their movement through the writing process. Similarly, invigilator teachers use the check-list as they collaborate with the researcher to administer the paragraph writing test in the two target schools.

8. List of important aspects of the paragraph writing test:

Performance levels/ errors are compared in terms of:

a) Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence (contains 9 points);
b) Coherence - the logical flow of ideas (9 points);
c) Cohesion - proper use of transition words and connectors (5 points);
d) Paragraph development with the right kind, the right level of details and with the right pattern of development (9 points);
e) Language-correctness of vocabulary and grammar (8 points);

- 104 -

f) Correctness of punctuation, spelling and capitalization (6 points); and

g) Legibility- readability (4 points). (See details under 12, METHOD OF SCORING.

9. Rating: individual's score from 50% is calculated and then converted to, _____ X 2 = 100%, finally, to a 5-point scale.

10. Requirements for the paragraph writing test

i. All the candidates need to use a white sheet of paper that would be distributed by the invigilator. Smaller sizes and other colors are not acceptable. No decorations or fancy borders are to appear on the paper.

ii. Candidates, instead of names, are expected to write code numbers (to be provided by the invigilator(s)), and also the name of the school and the date on the spaces provided to do so.

iii. All paragraph written papers must be handwritten. Typed work will not be accepted.

iv. All the candidates should write the paragraph within the given time, and in front of the invigilator. No assignment is taken to home for another day submission.

v. Jimma Preparatory School candidates are invigilated either in 3 separate exam-rooms or in the school hall accommodating all the candidates into one; Eldan Preparatory candidates are invigilated in a hall, one wider classroom or two, depending on the situation.

11. Check for scoring reliability and validity

The researcher controls correction and scoring of the whole candidates work with a single – eye inspection; taking rating task as his own responsibility. This, regardless of time consumption, can help to reduce scorer's bias.

- The accomplishment of rating is going to be completed within 5 working days as once this process is started.
- The process of recording will be made by the researcher and his assistants.

12. METHOD OF SCORING (EXPECTATIONS):

1	Unity of the paragraph including topic sentence (contains 9 points)	Assigned values			
1.1	The candidate has used an effective topic sentence to create a unified paragraph. **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
1.2	The quality of oneness of the idea. **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
1.3	Tightness with that of the main idea. **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
1.4	All -topic, supporting and concluding-sentences are telling the reader about one main idea. **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
1.5	Everything in the paragraph is subordinated to and derived from the controlling idea **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0

2	Coherence: the logical flow of ideas (contains 9 points)	Assigned values			
2.1	Paragraph organized in a logical manner **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
2.2	The paragraph has a definite plan of development. **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.3	The paragraph ideas all work together to explain and support the controlling Idea. (*Lee & Kelly, 2012*) **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.4	Orderly sequence to ensure a smooth progression (*Maxine, 1992*) **(5 points)**	//////	/////	/////	//////
2.4.1	Parallel construction **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.4.2	Proper pronouns **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.4.3	Synonyms **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.4.4	Repetition of key words **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
2.4.5	Transitional words (1 point)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0

3	Cohesion: proper use of transition words and connectors (5 points)	Assigned values			
3.1	The paragraph has shown with clearly connected sentences. **(1 point)**	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
3.2	The connections are grounded in explicit linguistic elements; i.e., words, Cues, signals, etc. (*McNamara, et al., 1995*) **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
3.3	Cohesive items played an important role to make the description a unified and meaningful. **(2 points)**	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0

4	Adequate Development (8 points)	Assigned values			
4.1	The paragraph is in its full development of the idea for the reader. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
4.2	Readers can understand fully how the student – writer reached his/her conclusion (Kept the right level of supporting detail). (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
4.3	The student-writer demonstrated his/her paragraph with descriptive pattern of development. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
4.4	The student-writer attempted to give sufficient information as to make the reader feel the topic sentence is sufficiently discussed *(Edda, 2009)* (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0

5	LANGUAGE: correctness of vocabulary and grammar (8 points)	Assigned values			
5.1	The student- writer adopted effective vocabularies in his/her paragraph (4 points)	1.0	2.0	3.0	4.0
5.2	The paragraph is effective in terms of subject-verb agreement (1point)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
5.3	Clear from sentence fragment. (1point)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
5.4	Clear from run-on sentence. (1point)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0
5.5	Description emphasized on active voice than passive. *(Beare,2013)* (1point)	0.25	0.5	0.75	1.0

6	Correctness of Punctuations, spellings (6 points)	Assigned values			
6.1	Correctness of punctuation marks. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
6.2	Correctness of spelling. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
6.3	Correctness of capitalization. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0

7	Legibility- readability (4 points).	Assigned values			
7.1	The paragraph is of an interest for the reader to read it without any difficulty (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
7.2	The student- writer's descriptive text contains information that has some relations to his/her peers' background. (2 points)	0.5	1.0	1.5	2.0
X	TOTAL RATING FROM 50	/50			
XX	TOTAL SCORE FRPM 100%	/100			

13. Method of Scaling and Data Recording

Candidate's paragraph writing performance effectiveness level is judged with obtainable mean values of:

1	0.05—1.49	as	Very low
2	1.50---2.49		low
3	2.50---3.49		satisfactory
4	3.50---4.49		high
5	4.50---5.00		Very high effectiveness

Appendix B: Summary of Interviewees' Response

Dear teacher,

The purpose of this interview is to conduct a comparative study on Grade 11 students' performance in EFL paragraph writing undertaking two preparatory schools, Jimma Preparatory School (public) and Eldan Preparatory School (private). I assure you that the data will be used for research purpose, to fulfill the requirement of MA in teaching English as a Foreign Language. I hope your genuine information could help me much to reach at a meaningful conclusions.

First of all, I would like to forward my thanks for your kind collaboration in sharing me your valuable time and information you had on the issue under investigation.

Thank you in advance!

Q.1 It can be said that if properly and adequately handled, writing is a smooth task to teach and assess the students effectively. How do you get writing in your own classroom experience?

According to the personal view of individual interviewees, writing is not as such a smooth task because knowledge of the subject matter, the students' early background is one of the major decisive factors to use the language effectively, employ words properly and write effective paragraphs. As most of the interviewees made it clear, there are only few students who attempt to show confidence and write with promising competence. They often explained that the majority of the students commit many errors in structuring sentences, developing paragraphs, using language, applying of mechanics and using correct cohesive devices. As far as the belief of the interviewees is concerned, since writing is a productive skill in which one has to generate thoughts, create ways of developing ideas and employ mechanisms to achieve unity and coherence, cohesion and appropriate grammar and vocabularies, writing is more challenging task for the majority of the students as compared to other macro and micro skills. The teachers expressed that most of the students dislike the writing skill, and as a result, are less effective in their writing. Therefore, the

- 109 -

responses gained from the interviewed teachers indicate that these teachers perceive their students' paragraph writing ability as low.

Q.2 How do you evaluate your students' effectiveness in the writing class? Do they show commitment to do a lot in writing? How about their ability to write good paragraphs?

In response, the interviewed teachers unanimously expressed that the degree of the students' effectiveness in paragraph writing is very low; except a few, their performances in many aspects of writing are generally below the requirements stated in the syllabus material. The students' ability in writing shows the students' performance problems. That means, paragraph writing is one of the areas the students perform with greater anxiety and errors,

Q.3 If you believe that the students are less effective (or totally ineffective) as desired in the curriculum, what do you think are the possible cause(s) for this inability?

According to the responses obtained from most of the interviewees, the reasons for the students' inability to write well enough to meet the required expectations are many and varied. As one of the interviewees explained, speaking and writing are both regarded as productive language skills requiring learners to produce the language they have learned. It is the communication of one's ideas to other people and the externalization and remaking of thinking. The response of this informant implies that one of the factors that make writing difficult for students is the fact that it is a productive skill that involves high cognitive and linguistic skills at various levels.

The possible ineffectiveness factors, as supposed by majorities, were multi-dimensional. Many students never understood, first and for most, learning as their own responsibility. The students do not usually show commitment to take responsibility for their own learning through writing. Efforts yield more efforts and desired results. Regular attendance, regular performance, and a good deal of trial and error need to be the guiding principle of every classroom. As far as developing effectiveness in writing skill is concerned, the students require reading more and more, to take writing practices in school and at home and try it consistently. But many of the students don't do this regularly.

- 110 -

Q.4 In which aspect(s) of paragraph writing are your students especially week?

The students' regular efforts are often missing in their inner driving forces, and in the surface of the classroom. As one interviewee from Jimma Preparatory pointed out, without doubt, many factors, such as the teachers' negative impact and students' lack of interest in English, are responsible for the poor writing ability of many English language classrooms. Lack of adequate linguistic background, shyness, anxiety and fear of making errors, and learners' readiness or attitude to the target language are almost poor to maintain classroom motivation. It is often hard for English language teachers to sustainably enhance the students' attitudes in the writing classroom environment because of the learners' inadequate linguistic background.

Another teacher said that the students do not see the importance for them to learn what is being taught. Many students couldn't think that what they are learning in the writing class is useful for them in the future. Most of the students don't like what they are learning in the writing class. They do little to perform with written home works, and do not properly insist themselves to write after class study. When writing, they poorly try to connect the things they are writing about with what they already know, and most of the time, many students write ineffective sentences and paragraphs keeping with the rules of spelling, capitalization and punctuation marks.

The third interviewee said that the students couldn't get adequate exposures for writing. Most of the time, we assess and evaluate the students' writing abilities in objective method. For me, grades should reflect students' effort and hard work that includes ''true'' writing. Multiple choice questions, as it has been an everlasting mechanism to assess the students' writing abilities and experiences, has little to contribute for the students to become effective writers. ''I am not very interested with my students' progress in the writing area'', he added.

The forth interview question was stated as "In which aspect(s) of paragraph writing are your students especially weak?" In their response, the interviewees pointed out that the students' knowledge about the main types of writing, i.e. descriptive, narrative, expository and persuasive writing is below the expectation. Poor language, vocabulary, punctuation are the very areas the students show inconsistency and accuracy. They never/or little bother about keeping oneness of the

idea in their paragraph [unity], show less concern in maintaining coherence and connections. As the interviewees believed, the students' background knowledge to effectively equipping their paragraphs with topic sentence and supporting details is very little. One of the interviewees from Jimma Preparatory School explained that the students' knowledge and skill gap is not only related to perform effective paragraphs, but even many of the students' confidence and competence level in determining the type of extract, whether it is descriptive, narrative, expository or persuasive, have still been below the standard requirement.

This issue is critical because of the reason that identifying topic sentence from a given extract, determining the type of extracts whether it is descriptive, narrative, expository or persuasive, and placing proper punctuations in proper places are not only vital to assist them for effective writer. But also these components are areas of emphasis where the students will get challenged when they sit for University Entrance Exam after a year. As one interviewee from Eldan Preparatory School mentioned, the students' ability in arranging their ideas and feelings and using proper transitional words, grammar and vocabulary are serious shortcomings.

Q.5 "**Do you think the students' linguistic background is adequate to undertake different patterns of paragraph development, and with a reduced number of error that may possibly be committed in their paragraph structuring?**

In response, all of them expressed that the students' backgrounds are inadequate to write effective paragraphs, and for some, even effective sentences. According to one interviewee from Jimma Preparatory School, making complaints on the students' background seems to point one's finger at teachers of the previous grade levels, especially, the primary schools. He said that the background of the students is remarkably grated with the education policy all teachers are implementing right now. When they are given to write paragraph, they often mix all the parts, introduction, body and conclusion into one. Generally, all the interviewees expressed in that their students' linguistic background is a critical problem to effectively undertake effective paragraph writing using different methods of development and patterns of organization.

Q.6 How often do you assess your students' paragraph writing performance? And what feedback mechanisms do you frequently allow the students in your paragraph teaching class?

To sum up, a few teachers show commitments in area of providing the students with continuous assessments and show strong and regular attention emphasizing on process approach over product approach of writing; and provide their students with timely, persistent and participatory feedback. Some fear the work-loads writing assessment poses on their time, energy and effort, and rarely provide writing assessment; involve in product approach over the process. They seldom provide comprehensive and inclusive feedback. Others engage in both process and product approaches of writing; and made writing assessments chapter after chapter, but hung feedback on the efforts of very few writing outputs.

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation