Effects of Instruction in Pre-Writing Strategy on Students' Achievement in Idea Organization and Paragraphing

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

The rate at which students' composition writing is degenerating requires an urgent approach to improving students' ability in idea generation and paragraphing at the secondary school level. It is against this backdrop that this paper attempt to determine the effects of instruction in pre-writing strategy on senior secondary students' achievement in idea generation, and paragraphing. The study was a quasi-experimental one that utilizes a non-equivalent pre-test and post-test design. Students' composition writing achievement test was used to collect data from 120 SS one students from four intact classes. The data collected were computed using the mean, and standard deviation to answer the research questions and student's t-test to test the hypotheses formulated. Findings from the analyses showed that exposure to the pre-writing strategy achieved higher coherent paragraphing in composition writing than their counterparts who were taught composition writing using the conventional method.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Composition writing is a complex activity that involves several skills to evoke the right information in the target audience. These skills include idea generation, sentence construction, idea organization, coherent paragraphing, and editing using acceptable conventions. Idea generation is a thought-provoking act of creating and communicating new thoughts. It is the creative act that encompasses cognitive activities like brainstorming, free-writing, and outlining to note down as many ideas as possible that come to mind. Students find it difficult to generate relevant ideas when writing compositions [1]. The inability of students to generate relevant ideas renders their composition writings scanty and without perspective, which in turn, makes students lack proficiency and loss valuable marks in their composition writing.

The composition writing process is done in stages. The stages include the pre-writing, drafting, and revising stages. The pre-writing stage is considered the most difficult of the whole writing process. As a planning stage, it requires critical thinking ability to brainstorm and generate ideas for the whole writing process [2]. While the drafting stage denotes giving the composition its content and form, the revising stage is concerned with restructuring a text for efficiency. The composition writing process is not linear but follows a recursive nature, whereby a writer revisits the stages of writing an indefinite number of times until there is satisfaction. This makes composition writing a complex activity that students and teachers alike grapple with its constraints, requiring cognitive perceptual skill, ample time, reflection, repetition, and revision to communicate information effectively to the target audience.

Idea organization is the act of being intentional in presenting ideas. This composition writing skill includes the grouping of related ideas on a theme and the presentation of these ideas in a manner that the ideas flow for effective communication [3]. Most students find this writing skill too, a challenging one as their composition writings are fraught with ambiguity due to the presentation of unrelated ideas, prompting the need for teachers to enhance students' composition writing skills. According to Bitrus [4], composition writing ability can be used to regress writers' abilities in other aspects of learning. This is because composition writing requires cognitive ability such that students who exhibit a good ability in composition writing, do better in English and other discipline areas. Thus, students' ability to write good compositions in English is correlated with their ability to excel in other aspects of learning.

Statistics indicate that from 2016-2020, there has been a decline in students' achievement in composition writing and in English, particularly in Plateau State. Students' achievement in Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE), conducted by the West Africa Examination Council (WAEC), reveals the rate of students' failure in English. A report from the state Ministry of Education, Plateau State, shows the rate of students who could not make a credit pass in English in WAEC for 2016 is 30%; in 2017 is 40%; in 2018 is 64%; in 2019 is 41.4%; and in 2020 is 22.3%. Commenting on students' failure in English and composition writing specifically, WAEC Chief Examiner (2017 and 2018) avers that most students are generally unfamiliar with writing conventions as their compositions fail to show a clear understanding of the topic and their language is marred with wrong grammar and incorrect vocabulary and poorly constructed sentences that assign unimaginable meanings to words. The Chief Examiner further states that besides scanty contents, students' composition writings lack relevant content, and are wrought with gibberish expressions and punctuation errors as well as shorthand and pidgin English which dotted students' compositions.

The causes of senior secondary school students' low achievement in English and composition writing specifically, cannot be readily traced to a particular deficiency, however, a study by Ezeokoli and Igubor [5] revealed that most of the problems faced by student-writers are closely related to ineffective methodologies, which consequently exerts detrimental effects on the students, such as fear, lack of motivation and poor composition writing skills. The authors further maintain that what obtains in most composition writing classrooms is a practice that is an offshoot of the product approach commonly referred to as the conventional method. Employing this method, the teacher writes the topic on the chalkboard, after a few prompts, students are asked to write their own

compositions, sometimes, after the teacher's model as either a class work or a take-home assignment. The teacher collects students 'compositions and circles all spelling errors, poor punctuation, grammatical inaccuracies, and incorrect sentences.

As a result, the conventional method only leads students to mere memorization of a set of rules to produce a text and does not allow the students the opportunity to explore their cognitive or mental capacity to produce a text they would claim ownership of. At the same time, it may not adequately prepare students for a strategic writing process that would allow them to adeptly adapt cognitive requisites that are inherent to composing a text for a variety of purposes and audiences.

To ameliorate and positively improve students' composition writing, effective and innovative instructional methodologies like the pre-writing strategy are advocated in composition writing classes. Pre-writing strategy is an activity-based instructional method. It is a reflective system of planning used prior to beginning the written draft and is used throughout the writing process to enhance organization within the broad view of the process relative to the final product [6]. Using this methodology, the learners are aware and engaged in a step-by-step learning strategy where, students are positively guided with good prospects on how to think, practice, and self-evaluate the activities within the pre-writing stage of learning with the aim of transforming them into independent learners in terms of idea generation, sentence construction, idea organization, paragraphing, and editing. Hence, prompting the need for its usage in the pre-writing stage which is considered the hardest but crucial to the entire writing process.

Instruction in pre-writing activities has been proven to increase students' composition writing [7]. These pre-writing activities include brainstorming, which is a mind-activating activity to generate ideas in relation to an identified theme. Free-writing is a 5-10 minute non-stop writing of ideas as they come to mind on a given topic. The journalistic method employs the WH-questions where prompts like who, what, where, why, and how are used to elicit ideas used to develop a text. The tree diagram presents ideas in order of hierarchy. Others are tagmemics – an idea that facilitates an extensive network of ideas the writer gets through questioning. Listing and outlining are used to note words or ideas in complex sentences without punctuation.

Nutshelling pinpoints ideas or words that seem relevant or important. Clustering entails a visual network of ideas that guides a student to new paths of thinking. In as much as studies have correlated effective composition writing to a well-designed methodological instruction in pre-writing which is a stage where the actual cognitive activities that give writing its hallmark take place, not too many teachers of English allot significant time and effort to this crucial stage of writing.

The use of a pre-writing strategy in the teaching of composition writing enhances students' writing generally. Hence, the study intends to use a pre-writing strategy on senior secondary students to determine the effects it exerts on students' composition writings in terms of idea generation, meaningful sentence construction, coherent idea organization, logical paragraphing, and proper editing. Considering students' achievement in composition writing and the methodologies used in writing classes, the study sets out to investigate the effects of instruction in pre-writing strategy on senior secondary students' achievement in idea generation.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to determine the effects of instruction in pre-writing strategy on senior secondary students' achievement in idea organization and paragraphing in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to;

1. ascertain SS1 students' ability to organize ideas logically in composition writing before and after treatment in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria.
2. ascertain the extent to which SS1 students are able to present ideas in coherent paragraphs before and after treatment.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the pre-test and post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in experimental and control groups' ability on logical idea organization in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria?
2. What are the pre-test and post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in experimental and control groups' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs?

1.3 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated and will be tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in the experimental and control groups' ability in logical idea organization in composition writing Bokkos LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in the experimental and control groups' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study adopted the quasi-experimental research design. Specifically, the non-equivalent pre-test post-test control group was designed to determine the effects of instruction on pre-writing strategy on senior secondary school students' achievements in composition writing in Bokkos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria. The design involves comparing a group that will undergo treatment (experimental group) with a group that treatment will be withheld (control group). The quasi-non-equivalent control design is used to compare the effect of treatment and also control major threats to internal validity.

2.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study was 419 SS one students from two Public Secondary Schools in Bokkos LGA of Plateau State, Nigeria. The sample for the study comprised 120 students drawn from four intact classes in the two government secondary school selected through a simple random sampling technique, specifically the 'hat and draw method.

2.3 Instrument

The instrument used in the study was a student composition writing achievement test (SCWAT) developed by the researchers using past senior secondary certificate examination (SSCE) question papers as a guide. The instrument was divided into two sections: A and B. Section A elicited students' demographic data which included: school, name, class, and admission number. Section B of the instrument was an expository composition topic requiring students to write on **'My Future Career'**. The topic was adapted from the students' textbook: Intensive English for Senior Secondary School 1 [8]. The expository composition was chosen based on the fact (researcher's experience) that many students find it difficult to write on expository topics. Students were also required to write a composition of not less than 350 words, within the timeframe of 45 minutes.

Other topics for practice that helped to expose students to gain more mastery of composition writing were carefully selected from the areas of common interest. The topics included: Roles of Education in Nation Building, The Dangers of Alcoholism on Nigerian Youths, and Problems of Religion in Nigeria. The study used the pre-writing strategy where the focus was on instruction in three pre-writing strategy activities: brainstorming, free- writing, and outlining.

2.4 Validity

To ensure the efficiency of adaptation of the instrument, by providing a preamble and a reconstruction of the topic to a more interesting expository topic, the instrument was subjected to the judgment of two experts in the English Education Unit of the Department of Arts Education, and one expert from Research Measurement and Evaluation Unit, Department of Educational Foundations, all of the University of Jos.

2.5 Reliability

The instrument was administered to a group of SS1 students and re-administered after a period of three weeks. The two scores were computed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and a reliability index of 0.75 was and was considered adequate [9].

2.6 Experimental Procedure

Treatment for the experimental groups lasted for the period of 8 weeks, The first and last week was used for pre-test and post-test. The treatment lesson plan guided the conduct of the treatment. The researcher prepared 19 lesson plans covering 19 lessons that were delivered two times a week on a single period of 40 minutes and a double period of 80 minutes. During the treatment period, the researcher guided the students to generate as many ideas as possible that come to mind through brainstorming on the topic: 'The Roles of Education in Nation Building'. The students were

also instructed to free-write these ideas and group related ideas together using outlines. To ensure clarity and logicality in students' composition writing, students were guided on how to use sentences correctly to communicate their ideas. Students were directed to identify the different types of sentences and how they can be used to develop an idea.

The control groups did not receive any treatment as treatment was withheld from them. The control groups were taught composition writing using the conventional method for a period of 8 weeks. The researcher prepared 19 lesson plans that were delivered two times a week in a single period of 40 minutes and a double period of 80 minutes.

After the treatment which lasted for 8 weeks, the researcher conducted a post-test to both experimental and control groups in the 10th week. The test items were as same as the pre-test as students are asked to write a composition on 'My Future Career'. During the time of post-test administration, the researcher ensured close monitoring to guard against instances of internal invalidity.

2.7 Data Analysis

The research questions raised were answered using the mean and standard deviation. Hypotheses one and two were tested using t-tests for independent samples. The reason for choosing the t-test for independent samples was based on the fact that the samples were not formed on the basis of randomization but intact classes.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Research Question One

What are the pre-test and post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in the experimental and control groups' ability in logical idea

organization in Bokkos LGA, Plateau State, Nigeria?

The results of the analysis from Table 1 showed that the experimental group had a pre-test mean score of $\bar{X}$= 3.23, SD = 1.41, and a post-test mean score of $\bar{X}$12.30, SD = 2.18 with a mean difference of $\bar{X}$dd 8.57, while the control group had a pre-test mean scores of $\bar{X}$3.53, SD = 1.22 and a post-test mean score of $\bar{X}$5.20, SD = 0.91 with a mean difference of $\bar{X}$dd 1.67. The results indicated that the experimental group had a mean difference of $\bar{X}$dd8.57 which is higher than that of the control group of $\bar{X}$dd1.67.This implied that the pre-writing strategy improved students' achievement in idea generation more than the conventional method.

3.2 Research Question Two

What are the pre-test and post-test achievement mean scores of SSI students in the experimental and control groups' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs?

The results of the analysis from Table 2 show that the experimental group had a pre-test mean score of $\bar{X}$3.23, SD = 1.11, and a post-test mean score of $\bar{X}$11.71, SD = 2.16 with a mean difference of $\bar{X}$dd8.48. While the control group had a pre-test mean score of $\bar{X}$3.21, SD = 1.09, and a post-test mean score of $\bar{X}$4.95, SD = 0.90 with a mean difference of $\bar{X}$dd1.74. The results indicate that the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group of $\bar{X}$dd.8.48 is higher than that of the control group of $\bar{X}$ dd 1.74. This implies that the pre-writing strategy improves students' achievement in coherent paragraphs than the conventional method.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the post-test achievement mean scores of SS1 students in the experimental and control groups' ability in idea organization in composition writing.

Table 1. Results of the analysis of students' achievement in idea organisation for the experimental and control groups before and after treatment

Group		N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$\bar{X}$dd
Experimental	Pre-test	60	3.73	1.40	
	Post-test	60	12.30	2.18	8.57
Control	Pre-test	60	3.53	1.22	
	Post-test	60	5.20	0.91	1.67

Table 2. Results of the analysis of students' achievement in coherent paragraphs for the experimental and control groups before and after treatment

Group		N	$\bar{\text{X}}$	SD	$\bar{\text{X}}$dd
Experimental	Pre-test	60	3.23	1.11	
	Post-test	60	11.71	2.16	8.48
Control	Pre-test	60	3.21	1.09	
	Post-test	60	4.95	0.90	1.74

Table 3. Results of the t-test analysis for the experimental and control groups in idea organisation after exposure to treatment

Group	N	$\bar{\text{X}}$	SD	df	t	P-value	Sig
Experimental	60	12.30	2.18				
Control	60	5.20	0.91	118	23.24	0.000	0.05

Table 4. Results of the t-test Analysis for the experimental and control groups in coherent paragraphing after treatment

Group	N	$\bar{\text{X}}$	SD	df	t	P-value	Sig
Experimental	60	11.71	2.16				
Control	60	4.95	0.90	118	22.33	0.000	0.05

The results of the t-test analysis from Table 3 revealed that the experimental group (60) had ($\bar{\text{X}} = 12.30, \text{SD} = 2.18$) while the control group (60) had ($\bar{\text{X}} = 5.20, \text{SD} = 0.91$). The p-value of 0.000 (df = 118, t = 23.24) is less than the significant level of 0.05. This implied that the null hypothesis be rejected since there was a significant difference in idea organization mean scores between the experimental and control groups after the experimental groups were exposed to treatment. This implied that the pre-writing strategy helps to improve students' achievement in idea organization more than the conventional method.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the post-test achievement mean scores of SS 1 students in the experimental and control groups' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs in composition writing.

The results of the t-test analysis from Table 4 indicated that the experimental group (60) had ($\bar{\text{X}} = 11.71, \text{SD} = 2.16$) while the control group (60) had ($\bar{\text{X}} = 4.95, \text{SD} = 0.90$). The p-value of 0.000 is less than the significant level of 0.05. Implying that the null hypothesis is rejected.

Since there is a significant difference in the coherent paragraphing achievement mean scores between the experimental and control groups after exposure to different treatments, it, therefore, concluded that the pre-writing strategy helped to improve students' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs in composition writing more than the conventional method.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings from research question one revealed that students that were exposed to instruction in pre-writing strategy achieved a higher in their ability to organize ideas logically in composition writing than those that were taught using the conventional method. This finding is in accordance with the assertion of Salija (2016) who reported that the use of pre-writing strategy activity tends to be beneficial to students as it improves their achievement in composition writing in terms of logical idea organization. The implication of this is that instruction in pre-writing can benefit students' idea organization.

Findings from research question two revealed that students that were exposed to the pre-writing strategy achieved higher coherent paragraphing in composition writing than their

counterparts who were taught composition writing using the conventional method. This is in accordance with the views of Murtiningsh [10] who found that instruction in pre-writing strategy helps to improve students' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs in their composition writing. The implication is that when teachers use pre-writing to teach students composition writing, it will help to enhance student's ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs.

Findings from hypothesis one revealed that there are significant differences in the achievement mean scores of students that were taught idea organization using the pre-writing strategy and those that were taught using the conventional method. This finding is in accordance with the findings of Bulya [11] who found that pre-writing activities help students to organize ideas chronologically when writing composition. The implication of this is that when teachers use a pre-writing strategy to teach students composition writing, students' achievement is significantly improved.

Findings from hypothesis two revealed that there is a significance difference in the achievement mean scores in favor of students that were taught how to present ideas in coherent paragraphs using pre-writing strategy and those that were taught using conventional methods. This finding is in accordance with Maraqa [1] who asserted that pre-writing strategy has the potential to improve students' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs in composition writing. The implication of this finding is that the pre-writing strategy has the potential to improve student achievement in the way paragraphs are arranged coherently during composition writing.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDA-TIONS

The study concluded that the pre-writing strategy improved students' achievement in idea generation more than the conventional method of teaching composition writing and that the pre-writing strategy helped to improve students' ability to present ideas in coherent paragraphs in composition writing more than the conventional method. Therefore, teachers of the English language should use pre-writing strategy instruction in the teaching of composition writing to students as it has proven to increase students' achievement in composition writing. The study recommended that:

1. Pre-writing instructional strategy should be incorporated into the primary and junior secondary school curriculum. This will help in developing in the students at an early stage the skills required for effective composition writing.
2. The pre-writing instructional strategy should also be incorporated into teachers' training institutions to prepare future teachers of the English language on how to apply the strategy in English language classroom instructions.

CONSENT

As per international standard or university standard, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard guideline participant consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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