



THE USE OF PRE-WRITING ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN EXPOSITORY COMPOSITION IN JOS NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF PLATEAU STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of pre-writing activities to improve senior secondary students' achievement in expository composition in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental research design of non-equivalent groups was adopted for the study. This design was utilised because the researcher used intact classes as the school authority did not permit her to randomize. The design compared the experimental and control groups to determine the effects of the treatment. The two groups were pre-tested, then the experimental group was exposed to instruction on pre-reading activities, while the treatment was withheld from the control group. A sample of 82 SSII students was selected and assigned to the experimental (pre-writing) and control (conventional) groups using simple random sampling technique. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. Data were collected using a test tagged Expository Writing Achievement Test (EWAT). Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Co-Variance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that students who received treatment in pre-writing activities recorded greater achievement in content and expression. Based on the findings, the study concluded that pre-writing activities are effective language instruction for enhancing students' achievement in expository composition. Therefore, it was recommended that: teachers of English should adopt pre-writing activities to improve students' expository composition writing; students should acquaint themselves with pre-writing activities for improved achievement in expository composition; Government should sponsor the training of English language in the use of pre-writing activities to improve students' composition writing via seminars and workshops; curriculum planners and designers of English language textbooks should incorporate pre-writing activities into the secondary school students' composition writing programmes.

Keywords: pre-writing activities, expository composition, idea generation, brainstorming, outlining

Introduction

Writing is an indispensable skill that students are required to master for academic and career success. For one thing, students need to be able to express themselves coherently in writing to communicate well with teachers, colleagues and the outside world. For another, professional communication is done in writing, including academic and business proposals, term papers, research reports, job applications, and memo (Akoko, 2024).

By way of definition, writing is a process that involves putting down in print impressions, statements or declarations, words, phrases, clauses, and sentences which can convey ideas, feelings, emotions, opinions, instructions and information (Aliyu, 2010). When that is done in a sustained manner, it grows into a composition. In other words, writing is an active activity which begins first as an inscrutable bit or piece but develops into a meaningful whole.

Writing has a unique position in language teaching since its acquisition involves the practice and knowledge of three other language skills, which are listening, reading and speaking. Moreover, it requires mastering of other skills, such as metacognitive skills. Learners need to set an objective for their writing, plan it carefully, and think over its layout and logical structure (Klimova, 2013). The WAEC Marking Guide clearly stated that "the merit of a piece of writing should be judged in terms of the writer's success in achieving the purpose; be it to inform, to entertain, to instruct, admonish or persuade" (2011:1). In addition to the above, the Council states that; judgement will be based on varying degrees of factors such as; suitable opening, adequacy of subject matter, appropriateness of Language, clarity of exposition, mechanical accuracy, adequate development, good paragraphing, variation of sentence structures and types, and skilled sophisticated use of punctuation (2011:2)

It has been observed that there is a continuous mass failure in English Language in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations conducted by WAEC and NECO; which has become worrisome. According to the WAEC Chief Examiners' Reports, (1,2), this failure has been mainly attributed to poor writing

skills. This causal factor is relatable because of the complex and sophisticated nature of the writing skill. Secondary School English language teachers and WAEC examiners observed that students need help to compose well-structured essays during class writing exercises and examinations.

Given the importance of writing to students and society, one expects that students should be able to express themselves effectively in writing. However, this is not the case today, as most students cannot write comprehensive and coherent essays. According to Enighe, Gomwalk and Nnaji (2021), students do not know how to express their ideas effectively. Their compositions often lack proper sequence, and organised flow of ideas were not properly punctuated. The students' compositions lacked properly defined structure as many of them do not know what to write about. In most cases, students write down the title only while others write long and meaningless sentences.

According to Akoko (2024), students achieve poorly in composition writing because writing is introduced as a finished product and not as a process, hence the learning process is teacher-centred and attaches greater importance to grammatical correctness. Still, the teachers provide students with a model copy of written composition and the students are expected to imitate the model copy to produce their own copies. The method does not allow the students to initiate their own ideas and styles. The traditional methods do not allow the use pre-writing activities that could ignite students' creativity (Enighe et al, 2021). Meanwhile, for students to be able to write effectively, Akoko observes that writing should be introduced to them as a process-oriented activity.

Process writing is an alternative to product writing in which the writing instruction is provided in separate components. Bolaji (2022) states that the process approach provides a way to think about writing in terms of what the writer does instead of what the final product looks like, the pattern of organization, spelling and grammar. The process method is divided into three activities namely: pre-writing, actual writing, and post-writing. And indeed, the focus of this study is on pre-writing.

Pre-writing is the stage that involves generating ideas, strategies, and information for a given writing task. Prewriting activities take place before starting on the first draft of a paper. They include discussion, outlining, free writing, journals, and talk-write. In the writing class in particular, the stage also involves activities like organising the class, brainstorming, outlining, questioning, deducting background knowledge on what form to write (letter, essay, report among others), the audience and the purpose of writing. The students share ideas through discussion or collaboration and they further write down their contributions while the teacher shares with them on some writing models (Abas & Aziz, 2016).

In 2012, Jiwprasat researched on the effects of pre-writing on grade six students' writing ability. The study which was conducted in the context of English as a Second Language found that learning through pre-writing activities improved students' writing ability. In the same vein, Enighe et al (2021) investigated the effects of pre-writing activities on junior secondary school students' achievement in composition writing in Jos East Local Government Area, Plateau State. The results showed that the experimental group who was exposed to treatment, improved in their composition writing performance while the control group that was not exposed to treatment remained as they was in the pre-test.

Based on the foregoing, pre-writing activities improve students' writing ability both in the contexts of English Language as a Foreign Language (EFL) and English as a Second Language (ESL). Motivated by this finding, the researchers were optimistic that if pre-writing activities were deployed in the writing lesson, students' ability in composition would improve significantly in Jos North LGA of Plateau State. It was against this background that the study was conducted.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups?
2. What is the difference in the mean

expression achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean expression achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.

Methodology

The pre-test and post-test quasi-experimental research design of non-equivalent groups was adopted for the study. This design was utilised because the researcher used intact classes as the school authority did not permit her to randomize. The design compared the experimental and control groups to determine the effects of the treatment. The two groups were pre-tested, then the experimental group was exposed to instruction on pre-reading activities, while the treatment was withheld from the control group.

The population of this study was made up of all SSII students in public secondary schools in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, numbering 20 schools with a total of 1,684 students in the 2023/2024 academic session. The sample of the study was 82 SS II students in intact classes randomly selected from two public secondary schools in the area of the study and assigned to two instructional groups using simple random sampling technique. School A which had 42 SSII students in an intact class was used as the experimental group, while School B which had 40 students in an intact class was used as the control group.

The instrument for data collection was Expository Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) developed by the researchers to test students' achievement in composition writing. The instrument was in two sections: 'A' and 'B'. Section 'A' consisted students' demographic data which included: school name, class, group identification number. Section 'B' of the instrument focused on the expository composition. This part tested students' ability to write comprehensive expository composition.

The Expository Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) was adapted from the WAEC's 2023 English Language Paper II and was the expository composition question. It was particularly the question three in Section "A", Paper II. The question reads: "Write an article suitable for publication in one of your national dailies discussing the vandalization of public facilities in your country and its effects." Candidates were instructed to present their answers in not less than 450 words and were advised to spend 50 minutes.

To determine its relevance and appropriateness, the EWAT was submitted to two experts in the English unit of the Department of Arts Education, University of Jos; and two experts from research, measurement and evaluation from the Department of Education Foundations, University of Jos, to ascertain its validity. This process was to enable the validator to ascertain the face and content validity of the instrument. Meanwhile, the English Lesson Plan for Teaching Writing (ELPTW) was vetted and edited by two other language education experts before use. And to ensure its accuracy, the test of stability (test-retest) method was used to establish the reliability of EWAT. This reliability method was considered appropriate because it demonstrates the consistency of the scales and describes the extent to which the results of measurement of a single test from the same respondents remain stable. Another reason was that the items were not measured on the Likert scale which makes a stability test appropriate. The researchers first administered the EWAT to a group of SSII students in one of the schools not selected to participate in the research, assessed their performance and re-administered the same EWAT to the same group of students after two weeks, computed and correlated the two sets of scores using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to obtain the test-retest stability coefficient. In line with Drost (2011), the test-retest stability coefficients of 0.70 and above was considered very strong and was deemed reliable for administration in the main study.

The researchers further prepared a marking scheme which was used for the scoring of the items in the instrument. The instrument was made up of one question on expository composition writing. The question carried 100 marks which

were shared between the two skills tested: content, 50 marks; expression, 50 marks. The behavioural objectives for both groups were the same except that the plans for the experimental group were based on pre-writing activities.

Two teachers were engaged, one each from two of the schools selected for the study to serve as research assistants. One teacher was from school A (experimental), while the other teacher was from school B (control). These teachers were both holders of B. A. (Ed) English. Only the teacher of the experimental group was trained on the use of pre-writing activities. The research assistant was trained for three days. Two hours were used for each training session, totaling 6 hours for the three days training. The training took place at school A after the school hours. The lesson for the experimental group was planned by the researchers. After the training, the researcher engaged the research assistant in micro teaching while the researchers listened to ensure that he had mastered the use of pre-writing activities before going into the class to teach the students. The research assistant for the control group, on the other hand, was not given any training because he was to teach the group using the conventional method. However, he was encouraged and supervised as he taught the topic in the scheme of work that was given to him.

The researchers convincingly explained the importance of the research to the students in the experimental group and told them what they stood to benefit from the study as stakeholders in education. However, such explanation was withheld from the control group. The experimental group was taught how to use pre-writing activities in expository composition writing while the control group was taught using the conventional method within the treatment period of four weeks. The research assistants were made to adhere strictly to the method designed in the lesson plan for the treatment. The treatment was based on the application of pre-writing activities of brainstorming and outlining. Participants in the experimental group met twice in a week for four weeks. This provided a tally of eight meetings. The duration for each meeting was 1 hour 20 minutes (double period), making the total number of 10 hours 40 minutes. Similarly, participants in the control group met

twice for four weeks providing the total of eight meetings which lasted for 1 hour 20 minutes (double period) totaling 10 hours 40 minutes as well.

Using the research assistants, the pre-test was administered to the students in the first week of the exercise. After the test, the scripts were retrieved from the students and marking was done accordingly. The scripts were kept till the post-test was administered to be able to compare the two results and determine if there was any difference in the writing ability of the students in the post-test as a result of the treatment. Like the pre-test, post-test was EWAT for both the experimental and control groups at the end of the sixth week of the treatment. There was no difference in the item in the post-test. The test was allotted the combined

duration of 1 hour 20 minutes (40 minutes each), and it tested the content and expression of the composition.

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the two research questions raised and ANCOVA was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The answer to the research questions were reported on a frequency table and the frequency table was used to summarize the data by showing how frequent each value occurred.

Results

The data collected were analysed and interpreted based on the two research questions and the two corresponding null hypotheses formulated.

Research Question One: What is the difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups?

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for the content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Experimental	42	14.76	1.94	28.29	2.02	13.53
Control	38	15.11	2.08	19.05	2.76	3.94
Mean difference		0.35		9.24		9.59

Data in Table 1 indicate that students in the experimental group had a mean achievement score of 14.76 at the pretest and a standard deviation of 1.94; they then had a mean achievement score of 28.29 and a standard deviation of 2.02 at the posttest, leading to a mean gain of 13.53. The students in the control group had a mean of 15.11 and a standard deviation of 2.08 at the pretest, they then had a mean achievement score of 19.05 and a standard deviation of 2.76 at the posttest, leading to a mean

of 3.94. The mean difference between the two groups at the pretest was 0.35 in favour of the control group, while there was a mean difference of 9.24 in the posttest between them in favour of the experimental group. Furthermore, there was a mean difference of 9.59 in between the mean gain of the two groups in favour of the experimental group. Thus, to answer the research question, the students who received treatment outperformed those who did not receive it in the area of content achievement.

Research Question Two: What is the difference in the mean expression achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups?

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for the expression achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean gain
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Experimental	42	12.76	1.89	26.31	2.42	13.55
Control	38	12.31	2.09	17.18	2.24	4.87
Mean difference		0.45		9.13		8.68

Data in Table 2 indicate that students in the experimental group had a mean achievement score of 12.76 at the pretest and a standard deviation of 1.89; they then had a mean achievement score of 26.31 and a standard deviation of 2.42 at the posttest, leading to a mean gain of 13.55. The students in the control group had a mean of 12.31 and a standard deviation of 2.09 at the pretest, they then had a mean achievement score of 17.18 and a standard deviation of 2.24 at the posttest, leading to a mean

of 4.87. The mean difference between the two groups at the pretest was 0.45 in favour of the experimental group, while there was a mean difference of 9.13 in the posttest between them in favour of the experimental group. Furthermore, there was a mean difference of 8.68 in between the mean gain of the two groups in favour of the experimental group. Thus, to answer the research question, the students who received treatment outperformed those who did not receive it in the area of expression achievement.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	1985.505 ^a	2	992.753	466.978	0.000	.924
Intercept	122.711	1	122.711	57.722	0.000	.428
Pretest_Content	284.771	1	284.771	133.953	0.000	.635
Group	1809.897	1	1809.897	851.353	0.000	.917
Error	163.695	77	2.126			
Total	47846.000	80				
Corrected Total	2149.200	79				

Table 3 reveals that there was a significant difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups. This is indicated by $F_{(1,77)} = 851.353$, $P =$

$0.00 < 0.05$. Thus, hypothesis one is rejected, which implies that students who received treatment had a superior content achievement.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the mean expression achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups.

Table 4: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects for Expression Achievement

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	2026.308 ^a	2	1013.154	1265.574	0.000	.970
Intercept	117.737	1	117.737	147.070	0.000	.656
Pretest_Expression	365.044	1	365.044	455.993	0.000	.856
Group	1630.066	1	1630.066	2036.185	0.000	.964
Error	61.642	77	.801			
Total	40720.000	80				
Corrected Total	2087.950	79				

Table 4 reveals that there was a significant difference in the mean content achievement scores of students in the experimental and control groups. This is indicated by $F_{(1,77)} = 2036.19$, $P = 0.00 < 0.05$. Thus, hypothesis two is rejected, which implies that students who received treatment had a superior expression achievement.

Discussion

The discussion of the findings focused on the analysis and interpretations of the two research questions raised and two null hypothesis formulated.

The findings revealed that students who received treatment had a superior content achievement. This is because instruction in pre-writing exposes students to activities like brainstorming, questioning, which enable them to deduct background knowledge on what form to write, the audience and the purpose of writing. This finding is in agreement with Jiwprasat (2012) who examined the effects of pre-writing on grade six students' writing ability and found that learning through pre-writing activities improved students' writing ability. This implies that pre-writing activities are effective for improving students' content ability in expository writing.

The findings further revealed that students who received treatment had a superior expression achievement. This is because pre-writing activities allow students to share ideas through discussion or collaboration. They write down their contributions while the teacher shares with them on some writing models. Thus they are able to render correct sentences in varied forms. This justifies the report of Enighe et al (2021) that students who were exposed to treatment in pre-

writing activities improved in their composition writing performance as against their counterparts who were not exposed to treatment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that pre-writing activities are effective language instructional strategy for improving students' content achievement in expository writing. It can also be concluded that they develop students' expression ability. In a sum, therefore, pre-writing activities are a productive language instruction for enhancing achievement in expository composition among other kinds of composition writing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Teachers of English should adopt pre-writing activities to improve students' expository composition writing.
2. Students should acquaint themselves with pre-writing activities for improved achievement in expository composition.
3. Government should sponsor the training of English language in the use of pre-writing activities to improve students' composition writing via seminars and workshops.
4. Curriculum planners and designers of English language textbooks should incorporate pre-writing activities into the secondary school students' composition writing programmes.
5. School administrators such as the principals should supervise English Language teachers

to ensure their use of pre-writing activities in the expository composition lesson.

6. Parents or guardians should monitor their children and wards' English lessons to confirm the application of pre-writing activities in composition writing lessons.

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