



EFFECTS OF PANEL DISCUSSION METHOD ON SENIOR SECONDARY STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ESSAY WRITING IN HAWUL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the effects of panel discussion method on senior secondary students' achievement in essay writing in Hawul Local Government Area, Borno State, Nigeria. The pre-test post-test quasi-experimental research design of the non-equivalent groups was adopted for the study. The sample consisted 108 SSII students purposively selected from the population of 1,533 SSII students in five public senior secondary schools in Hawul Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. Two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. Data were collected using a test tagged Students' Essay Writing Achievement Test (SEWAT). Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in generating ideas in essay writing. The results further indicated that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in sentence construction in essay writing. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that teachers of English Language in secondary schools should discourage the use of traditional methods of teaching that have proven ineffective but instead encourage the regular use of panel discussion method to improve students' achievement in essay writing; and Government should organise seminars and workshops for the retraining of English Language teachers on the importance and use of panel discussion to develop students' ability to write effective essays.

Keywords: *essay writing, idea generation, sentence construction, panel discussion method*

Introduction

Writing is a fundamental skill that plays a crucial role in education, professional development and personal growth. Essay writing is process that involves the expression of ideas, arguments and information in a coherent and structured manner. It is a form of academic writing that requires critical thinking, analysis and effective communication skills. The concept of essay writing revolves around the development and organisation of a central thesis or main idea, supported by relevant evidence, examples and logical reasoning. Essays typically have an introduction that provides background information and states the thesis, body paragraphs that present and develop arguments, and a conclusion that summarizes the main points and offers a thoughtful reflection or final statement (Tangpermpoon, 2018).

According to Dewi (2021), effective essay writing involves careful planning, research and revision, as well as adherence to proper grammar, punctuation and citation conventions. It requires the ability to analyze and interpret sources, think critically and construct a coherent and persuasive argument. Furthermore, essay writing encourages the development of independent thought, creativity and the ability to engage with complex ideas and concepts. It is a complex process that allows writers to explore thoughts and ideas and make them visible and concrete, a way of crossing the boundaries of time and culture, reaching those not present when the piece is written.

Writing holds crucial significance for academic success. Essay writing promotes research and information literacy skills. According to Bruce (2018), when individuals engage in essay writing, they are required to gather relevant information, evaluate its credibility and synthesise it effectively, which contributes to the development of information literacy skills. Besides, essay writing encourages individuals to engage in extensive research. In order to produce a well-written scholarly article, individuals must explore various sources of information, such as books, journals and reputable websites. As noted by McMillan and Weyers (2020), conducting research involves searching for and selecting appropriate sources of

information. This process allows them to gather a wide range of perspectives and evidence that enhance informed academic debates.

Intellectual development of individuals is another significant importance of essay writing. It serves as a means for students to consolidate their knowledge and understanding of a subject. According to Bean (2021), essay writing allows students to demonstrate their grasp of the material and their ability to think critically about it. By articulating their understanding of a topic in written form, students deepen their comprehension and engage in higher-order thinking. Moreover, essay writing helps students to develop discipline and time management skills. This is because it requires students to adhere to deadlines and allocate time for research, planning, drafting and revision. This process encourages students to manage their time effectively and develop a disciplined approach to their academic work. By honing these skills, students are better equipped to handle the demands of higher education and professional pursuits (McMillan & Weyers, 2020).

Despite the importance of writing to students, there is a significant gap between the expected level of proficiency in essay writing and the actual achievement of Nigerian senior secondary school students. Students are supposed to exhibit exceptional proficiency in essay writing. They should be capable of constructing well-organised, coherent and thought-provoking essays that not only showcase their understanding of English language but also prepare them for higher education and future academic and professional success. However, the reality paints a different picture, with a substantial proportion of them appearing to be struggling with fundamental aspects of essay writing such as idea generation and sentence construction. This is evident in WAEC Chief Examiner's report of 2023 which indicated that most of the students exhibited poor use of language and inability to construct simple and correct sentences.

Students' poor achievement in writing has numerous negative impacts on their overall academic development. To begin with, it hinders them from developing effective communication skills, both written and verbal, which are essential

for academic success and future career prospects. Also, the limitation in the knowledge of writing skills affects their ability to secure admission into higher institutions because Credit 6 is a requirement for registration into any course of study in any Nigerian higher institution and future employment opportunities that require strong written communication abilities. This explains why this problem should be addressed with urgency.

Several factors contribute to the problem of inadequate achievement in essay writing. What is of concern to this study is teachers' use of ineffective teaching methods that do not expose students to essay writing in meaningful ways. Regrettably, stakeholders' efforts to address the issue of poor achievement in essay writing, including introduction of various teaching methodologies to enhance students' writing capabilities, organization of writing workshops, and the incorporation of technology into the learning process, have proven abortive. This is as the problem appears to be persistent, with Itari (2019) reporting that many students continue to struggle, failing to meet academic standards and failing to grasp the full potential of their education. Therefore, this study sought to find out whether the implementation of the panel discussion method can offer a more effective means of addressing the longstanding challenge.

Panel discussion method is a type of discussion method which involves a group of experts or individuals with knowledge and expertise in a particular subject matter. The goal of a panel discussion is to provide different perspectives and insights on the topic at hand. This strategy allows for a dynamic and interactive conversation, where participants can ask questions, share their opinions and engage in a thoughtful debate. Panel discussions serve as a valuable platform for exchanging ideas, gaining new insights and fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues (Zhou, Wang, Zhang, Cheng, He, Shen, Shang, Shao, Ji, Chen, Xu & Wu, 2017).

Furthermore, panel discussion method provides a chance to exhibit a wide range of perspectives and foster inclusiveness by guaranteeing participation from individuals with

different backgrounds and experiences. The panel frequently draws a diverse group of participants, including professionals, students and amateurs, fostering opportunities for networking and collaboration. In addition, panelists can utilise their specialised knowledge to provide practical remedies and suggestions, rendering these debates a potent instrument for resolving issues and making informed choices (Masadeh, 2016). This is essential for fostering intellectual discourse and expanding knowledge in certain fields or industries. These talks offer a chance for participants to share ideas, question established concepts and investigate novel ways, and the inclusion of several viewpoints enhances the comprehension of the topic, promoting innovation and analytical thinking.

Several studies have been conducted to determine the effectiveness of panel discussion method in enhancing academic achievement. For example, Iskandar (2016) researched the effect of panel discussion on students' reading comprehension in Indonesia, and it was found that panel discussion method significantly affects the students' achievement in reading comprehension. Similarly, Patel (2017) investigated the influence of panel discussions on essay writing achievement among senior secondary students in India, and the result indicated that students who participated in panel discussions performed significantly better in essay writing than those who did not. In addition, Kim (2017) investigated the use of panel discussion to improve senior secondary students' essay in an Urban High School in South Korea. The findings indicated a significant improvement in essay writing achievement among students who participated in panel discussions.

In Nigeria, Sanda and Mazila (2017) conducted a study on the impact of lecture and discussion methods of teaching on learners' achievement in social studies in a continuing education institution in Borno State, Nigeria, and the findings revealed that students who received instruction through the discussion method achieved superior academic achievement compared to those taught using the lecture method. Also, Yusuf, Guga and Ibrahim (2016) conducted a study on the discussion method and

its effect on the achievement of students in reading comprehension in secondary schools in Plateau State, and the findings revealed a statistically significant difference between the average scores of students in favour of the experimental group. Given this proven effectiveness, these researchers were optimistic that if panel discussion method was implemented in senior secondary schools in Hawul Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria, students' achievement in essay writing would improve significantly, hence the study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the pre-test and post-test achievement scores of students in generating ideas in the experimental and control groups?
2. What are the pre-test and post-test achievement scores of students in sentence construction in the experimental and control groups?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are formulated to guide the study and they will be tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test achievement scores of students in generating ideas in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test achievement scores of students in sentence construction in the experimental and control groups.

Methodology

This study employed the quasi-experimental design, specifically the non-equivalent pre-test and post-test control group design. Quasi-experimental research design is used where it is not possible to carry out random assignment of subject to groups. The design tests students' achievement by comparing them in groups: a group that would undergo treatment (experimental) and a group that treatment would not be given treatment (control) (Mwanse,

Dalong & Zuhumben, 2022; Akoko, 2024). This design was used because the researchers had only the option of using intact classes as the school authorities did not permit distortion in the class setting and timetable in the course of undertaking the research.

The population for this study consisted of all the 1,533 SSII students in five public senior secondary schools in Hawul Local Government Area of Borno State, Nigeria. The sample for the study consisted of a total of 108 SSII students from two public secondary schools in the location of the study. The two schools sampled were school A and school B. An intact class in school A comprising 52 students was used as the experimental group (A), while an intact class in school B comprising 56 students was used as the control group (B).

The sampling technique for selecting the schools for the study was the simple random sampling technique, specifically the hat and draw method. The researchers first of all numbered the 5 schools in the area of study. The numbers were written on pieces of papers, squeezed and put inside a hat and shuffled after which two of these numbers were randomly selected. This method was employed to give each school equal chance of being selected. Afterwards, the intact classes of SS II A students in the two sampled schools were purposely chosen for the study and were assigned the experimental group (A) and control group (B).

The instrument that was used for data collection in this study was a test tagged "Students' Essay Writing Achievement Test" (SEWAT). The instrument was adapted from the WAEC 2023 Senior School Certificate Examination English Paper II, particularly the question 4 which reads: "You are the main speaker in a debate on the topic: Students in rural schools have more advantages than those in urban centers. Write your argument for or against the motion". The modified question as captured in the SEWAT by the researchers was: "You are the main speaker in a debate on the topic: Students in rural schools have more advantages than those in urban centers. Advance four points for or against the motion." The instrument had two sections: 'A' and 'B'. Section 'A' consisted of students' demographic data which include: school name, class, group

identification number. Section 'B' of the instrument was the analytical part focusing on the argumentative essay writing. This part tested students' ability to argue constructively by generating ideas and constructing sentences effectively. It contained the instruction that students should apply their knowledge of essay writing in their arguments. Also, students were required to write not less than 350 words in 45 minutes.

In order to ascertain the content validity, the adapted instrument was subjected to scrutiny by experts. Two experts in English Education Unit, Department of Arts Education and one expert in the Research, Measurement and Evaluation Unit of the Department of Educational Foundations both Faculty of Education, University of Jos. The experts in English Education Unit were required to make sure that items were clearly structured and free of ambiguity and also usefulness and appropriateness of the instruction, the ease of wordings and the relevance of the items to the variables under investigation. The experts in Research, Measurement and Evaluation were required to assess the suitability and adequacy of the instruction as well as ensure that the statement of the item fairly represented the contents it purported to measure (content validity). They also ensured that instrument was attractive, appealing and well arranged (face validity). All the corrections, suggestions or modifications made by the experts were taken into considerations in the final production of the instrument.

To establish the reliability of the SEWAT, the test-retest method was used. The researchers carried out a pilot study on two intact classes randomly selected from two schools that were not included in the main study. The instrument was trial-tested by being administered to a group of SSII students and re-administered after a period of two weeks. The two scores were correlated using Pearson Product Movement Correlation (PPMC). A reliability coefficient of 0.83 was considered as reliable. This was in line with Ugodulunwa (2020) who suggests that a reliability coefficient of 0.75 and above can be judged as reliable for administration in the main study.

In week one of the exercise, the researchers with the help of the two research assistants,

administered the pre-test to the experimental and control groups using the SEWAT. The purpose of the pre-test was to determine the respondents' initial essay writing abilities and the equivalence of the two groups. The exercise was monitored by the researchers to ensure that examination conditions were observed. The scripts were collected for scoring and recording by the researchers.

The treatment training schedule for the experimental group is tagged "Panel Discussion Strategy Training" (PDST). The administration of PDST will be carried out by the research assistant. The purpose of the treatment was to improve secondary school students' argumentative essay writing ability. The activities in the sessions will last for six weeks (week 2-7). The six weeks were used for administering the treatment package and then the eighth was used for post-test. For the control group, the schedule used was the normal English Language scheme of work on essay writing. The students were taught by the research assistant in school B after the administration of the pre-test in the first week. From week two to the seventh, the students in this group were taught using the normal "chalk and talk" method of teaching argumentative essay writing for the period of six weeks; while the eighth week was for post-test.

After the treatment, the post-test was administered on the eighth week using the SEWAT. All the instructions given in the test were strictly observed. With the aid of the research assistants, the instrument was administered simultaneously to both the experimental and control groups under strict supervision which lasted for 45 minutes, then post-test scripts were retrieved for marking. The scoring rubrics of the instrument was a total of 100 marks. This was according to the various components assessed under idea generation (50%) and sentence construction (50%). A marking scheme was provided to guide the marking and scoring of the scripts.

For data analysis, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. On the other hand, Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test all the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The

use of ANCOVA was to help control any initial differences that may exist between the groups and other extraneous variables that could affect the findings other than the treatment. The analysis was aided by the SPSS software version 23.

Results

The results presented below are from the data collected based on the two research questions and the two corresponding null hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question One

What are the pre-test and post-test achievement of students in generating ideas in the experimental and control groups?

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Achievement Mean Scores of Students in Generating Ideas in the Experimental and Control Groups.

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain	Mean Difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	52	29.87	6.648	56.71	8.978	26.84	23.54
Control	56	33.13	9.852	36.43	6.586	3.3	

Table 1 presents the pre-test and post-test achievement mean score of students in generating ideas in essay writing in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group the post-test achievement mean score was 56.71 and standard deviation of 8.98, higher than the pre-test mean score of 29.87 and standard deviation of 6.65 with a mean gain of 26.84, indicating that there was improvement in the achievement of students after treatment using panel discussion method. For the control group, the pre-test mean score was 33.13 and a standard deviation of 9.85. The post-test mean score of students was 36.43 with a standard deviation of 6.59 indicating a

mean score gain of 3.3. The results show that students in the experimental group had a higher achievement mean score (56.71) after treatment than those in the control group (36.43) who were not given treatment with a mean difference of 23.54. This means that at the pre-test the students in both groups had a poor achievement and were at the same level, but after the intervention using panel discussion, the experimental group performed better than the control group. It means that panel discussion method did improve the students' achievement in generating ideas in essay writing.

Research Question Two

What are the pre-test and post-test achievement of students in sentence construction in the experimental and control groups?

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Achievement Mean Scores of Students in Sentence Construction in the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain	Mean Difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	52	25.67	7.009	53.48	10.245	27.81	25.31
Control	56	34.13	10.518	36.63	8.461	2.5	

Table 2 presents the pre-test and post-test achievement mean score of students in sentence construction in essay writing in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group the post-test achievement mean score was 53.48 and standard deviation of 10.25, higher than the pre-test mean score of 25.67 and standard deviation of 7.01 with a mean gain of 27.81, indicating that there was improvement in the achievement of students after treatment using panel discussion method. For the control group, the pre-test mean score was 34.13 and a standard deviation of 10.52. The post-test mean score of students was 36.63 with a standard deviation of 8.46 indicating a

mean score gain of 2.5. The results show that students in the experimental group had a higher achievement mean score (53.48) after treatment than those in the control group (36.63) who were not given treatment with a mean difference of 25.31. This means that at the pre-test the students in both groups had a poor achievement and were at the same level, but after the intervention using panel discussion, the experimental group performed better than the control group. It means that panel discussion method did improve the students' achievement in sentence construction in essay writing.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test achievement of students in generating ideas in the experimental and control groups.

Table 3: ANCOVA Result on Post-test Achievement Mean Scores of Students in Generating Ideas in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	11881.198 ^a	2	5940.599	109.284	.000	.675
Intercept	9478.948	1	9478.948	174.376	.000	.624
Pre-composition	788.668	1	788.668	14.508	.000	.121
Group	11825.181	1	11825.181	217.538	.000	.674
Error	5707.719	105	54.359			
Total	248053.000	108				
Corrected Total	17588.917	107				

a. R Squared = .675 (Adjusted R Squared = .669)

Table 3 indicates that $F(1,105) = 217.54, p < 0.05$, since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in generating ideas in essay writing. The result further reveals an adjusted R squared value

of .669, which means that 66.9 percent of the variation in the dependent variable which is achievement in generating ideas in essay writing is explained by variation in the treatment of panel discussion method, while the remaining is due to other factors not included in this study.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test achievement of students in sentence construction in the experimental and control groups.

Table 4: ANCOVA Result on Post-test Achievement Mean Scores of Students in Sentence Construction in the Experimental and Control Groups

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	7768.330 ^a	2	3884.165	44.415	.000	.458
Intercept	15345.089	1	15345.089	175.470	.000	.626
Pre-composition Group	107.695	1	107.695	1.231	.270	.012
Error	6979.869	1	6979.869	79.814	.000	.432
Total	9182.411	105	87.452			
Corrected Total	233138.000	108				
	16950.741	107				

a. R Squared = .458 (Adjusted R Squared = .448)

Table 4 shows that $F(1,105) = 79.81$, $p < 0.05$, since the p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in sentence construction in essay writing. The result further reveals an adjusted R squared value of .448, which means that 44.8 % of the variation in the dependent variable which is achievement in sentence construction in essay writing is explained by variation in the treatment of panel discussion method, while the remaining is due to other factors not included in this study. This implies that panel discussion method can help improve students' achievement in sentence construction in essay writing in Hawul Local Government Area, Borno State, Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in generating ideas in essay writing. This is because panel discussion method provides students with valuable platform for exchanging ideas, gaining new insights and fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues. The finding is in tandem with Iskandar (2016) whose study revealed that panel discussion method significantly improved students' achievement in reading comprehension. It also agrees with Patel (2017) who reported that students who participated in panel discussions in

India significantly outperformed their counterparts in essay writing, and Kim (2017) whose findings indicated a significant improvement in essay writing achievement among students who participated in panel discussions. This means that panel discussion method is effective for enhancing students' achievement in idea generation in particular and essay writing in general.

Furthermore, the results indicated that there was a significant effect of panel discussion method on achievement of students in sentence construction in essay writing. The reason is that the method promotes innovation and analytical thinking which are required for ability to combine sentences and use varied sentence types. This aligns with the report of Sanda and Mazila (2017) that students who received instruction through the discussion method achieved superior academic achievement compared to those taught using the lecture method. The finding also agrees with Yusuf, Guga and Ibrahim (2016) who reported a statistically significant difference between the average scores of students in favour of the experimental group (panel discussion). It implies that panel discussion method is crucial for improving students' ability to write effective essays.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that panel discussion is an effective

teaching method which teachers can use to develop students' ability to generate ideas and construct effective sentences. Ultimately, this will lead to improved achievement in essay writing and contribute to reducing students' failure in internal and external examination among other things.

Recommendations

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

1. Teachers of English Language in secondary schools should abandon the traditional methods of teaching that have proven ineffective and apply panel discussion method to improve students' achievement in essay writing.
2. Government should organise seminars and workshops for the retraining of English Language teachers on the importance and use of panel discussion to develop students' ability to write effective essays.
3. Curriculum designers should integrate the use of panel discussion method into the secondary school students' essay writing programmes.
4. School administrators like proprietors and principals should sponsor English Language teachers to workshops on the use of panel discussion method and encourage its adoption in the essay writing lesson.

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