



USE OF REFLECTIVE WRITING STRATEGY TO INCREASE SS 2 STUDENTS' INTEREST AND ACHIEVEMENT IN COMPOSITION WRITING IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the use of reflective writing strategy to increase SS 2 students' interest to and achievement in composition writing in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State. The study sought to determine the effect of reflective writing strategy on students' interest to and achievement in composition writing. Two research questions guided the study, while two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted a quasi-experimental research design. The population consisted of 1,655 (888 male and 767 female) senior secondary II students for the 2022/2023 academic session. A sample of 91 senior secondary II students located in two intact classes was drawn from two co-educational public secondary schools using simple random sampling technique. The Questionnaire on Students' Interest towards Composition Writing (QSACW), and Composition Writing Performance Test (CWPT) were used for data collection. Composition Writing Lesson Plans (CWLPs) were used for the intervention. The QSACW, CWPT and CWLP were developed by the researcher and validated by three experts. The reliability of the QSACW was calculated using Cronbach alpha and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was used to compute the reliability coefficient of CWPT and it yielded reliability coefficient of 0.85. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using ANCOVA. The study revealed a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy ($F = 46.60, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). The study found a significant difference between the mean performance scores of students taught composition writing with reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy ($F = 17.13, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). On the basis of the findings, it was recommended among other things, that English Language teachers should expose students to reflective writing strategy to improve their interest to and performance in composition writing.

Key Words: Reflective writing, composition, interest, achievement

Introduction

Writing is an essential skill in education, serving not only as a means of communication but also a tool for learning. It is a medium through which people can express their thoughts, ideas, feelings and beliefs about certain situations. It is also used for persuading, informing, entertaining, learning, reflecting or preserving information. It is a skill that requires the writer to simultaneously perform cognitive, affective and psychomotor activities. Such activities enable a writer to generate ideas, think about how to express and organise them in sentences and paragraphs that enable a reader to understand the written work.

Writing could be seen as the most concrete and systematic language skill. It is the most important and complex of all the four language skills (Oloko, 2010) as it builds on the other three skills (listening, speaking and reading). This is why many second language learners consider writing skill as a difficult task (Aika, 2020; Nnamani & Akabogu, 2020). However, if students are to become successful in school and workplace endeavour, writing skill must be mastered by them. Composition writing as an aspect of the English language curriculum at the senior secondary school level in Nigeria gives students training in letter writing (formal and informal), expository, narrative, descriptive and argumentative essays. According to Lagan (2011), writing is invaluable in helping students to communicate and understand how different parts of language go together. It enables a learner to develop comprehension and composition skills, makes their thoughts and experience to be long lasting, learn things in every subject area, and access and use more information than they could remember and recall. Therefore, students must be taught how to write well.

Proficiency in writing is a gateway to success in the global economy (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013). Effective writing skills also can be the ticket to better academic grades and better achievement, as the writing skills are critical to academic success. Writing is an important skill and a primary instrument which teachers of English language adapt to test or examine students' performance in all subjects across the curriculum (Muodumogu, 2010; Oyinloye &

Gbenedio, 2010).

Writing is one of the most widely used media of formal communication globally. Despite the advent to computers and other new media like android devices, these have not in any way replaced the written medium. Writing is not just a school requirement, it is a skill needed in the world of work. Both teachers and the general public rely on written work both as a means of accessing information as well as passing information to others. Udu and Gwang (2020) argue that written work (hand-written or type-written) give an accurate account of the writer's academic standing. Owing to its crucial role, composition writing has been made part of the primary, secondary and tertiary levels education curriculum. Composition writing is a form of expressive skill and it tests students' ability to choose words and punctuation signs appropriately. In composition writing practice, students are expected to write essays that have unity and clearly expressed ideas. They are to demonstrate general grammatical expression of intended meaning. With this in the mind, composition writing instruction should aim at helping students to develop capability in unbiased reporting of real events, clear expression of feelings and compliance with the conventions of writing to achieve.

Udu and Barde (2024) assert that, in spite of the benefits of writing, many senior secondary school students as second language users of English lack the ability and capacity to write good essays worthy of publication. This is because they have not built the right psycho-social skills like self-esteem, self-efficacy, attitude, interest, self-concept, social acceptance and inter-personal relationship through writing in English language. With these laudable benefits derived from writing, it is required that students should develop effective writing skills. However, many students find composition writing to be a tedious and uninspiring task (Graham & Perin, 2007). Similarly, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB) and National Examinations Council (NECO) Chief Examiners' reports' over the years (WAEC, 2021, NABTEB, 2020, & NECO, 2019), many candidates lack the

ability to write the required content and express their ideas. Their expressions were marred by errors in grammar; spelling and punctuation. Some of the candidates' expressions were generally gibberish or inappropriate to the context. Sometimes, candidates merely translated their mother tongue (L1) into the English language (L2). This under-achievement in writing has been traced to ineffective teaching strategies (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013) which have made students to become uninterested in writing. The key factor that contributes to this disinterest is a lack of engagement in the writing process (Smith & Jones, 2021).

Reflective writing strategy has been proposed as a potential solution to the problem (Smith & Jones, 2021). Reflective writing strategy refers to the conscious consideration of one's experiences, allowing individual to critically examine their thoughts processes and learning outcome (Dewey, 1933). Reflective writing strategy aligns with John Dewey's notion of "systematic thinking task." a form of problem – solving approach that involves analysing a situation, identifying a problem, considering potential solutions, and choosing the best course of action through careful consideration and evaluation (Main, 202). In the context of composition writing, it typically involves students writing about their writing process – exploring their challenges, successes and areas for improvement (Smith & Jones, 2021). This approach helps students develop their Meta cognitive skills, enabling them to become more aware of their learning process and fostering deeper connection to their writing. Through reflective writing, individuals can gain deeper insights, make connections, and develop a greater understanding of themselves and their experiences (Oluwadare & Akinloye, 2022). In composition writing, reflective writing helps students recognize patterns in writing, identify areas for growth and connect their personal experiences to broader learning outcome (Yancey in Smith & Jones, 2021).

Research (Munna & Kalam, 2021) demonstrates that the more the lesson is interactive, the more the learners are engaged and motivated to improve their learning experiences. Interactive methods are believed to increase

students' critical thinking skills and give them opportunities for collaboration and knowledge sharing. Interactive methods increase students' interest and achievement in a skill subject like English language (Udu, 2012). Reflective writing is an example of an interactive method of writing instruction and it is hoped that when used in the desired way, could be beneficial to both learners and teachers. To the learners, they will be able to see writings as a process while to teacher; it will help them in professional development (Allan & Driscoll, 2014; Sheppick, 2024).

One of the effective approaches to reflective writing strategy is the Gibbs' Reflective Cycle, which involves six stages namely description, feelings, evaluation, analysis, conclusion and action plan (Gibbs, 1988).

Descriptive: This phase represents what occurred. Learners are to be guided to reflect on what they have practically observed or experienced. This involves providing details as who is involved in an event, when the event occurred, where it occurred and the consequences of such actions on oneself and on others.

Feelings: Learners always reflect or are expected to reflect on the actions and experiences as they affect them or how they affect others. Feeling includes all forms of emotional responses or reactions.

Evaluation: This depicts deciding what was considered good or bad about the learning situation or experiences.

Analysis: This represents the sense a learner makes out of an experience or learning situation. Learners use analysis to sift for relevant knowledge and the rationale behind certain occurrences, how they happened, and possible ways of averting them.

Conclusion: Conclusion in the context of Gibb's (1988) reflective represents what the learner could have done differently and what they have learned from the experience (main, 2023).

Action Plan: this describes what actions are likely to be taken should the situation arise again. The learner might meet similar situations in the future. Outlining plans for action becomes necessary to prevent recurrence or improve situations that demand more positive outcomes.

Using the Gibb's (1988) model requires practical classroom practices in which the teacher is expected to:

- (a) Help learners to develop self-awareness. This could be in the form of reflecting on their emotions and reactions without making judgments.
- (b) Make use of concrete examples based on their specific experience to support analysis.
- (c) Make a connection between theory and practice. This suggests that the teacher creates classroom scenarios that help learners to connect what is perceived to exist and what exists in reality.
- (d) Help learners identify their strengths for purposes of leveraging them to flourish in learning.
- (e) In all classroom situations, the teacher is to encourage active and constant reflection as this will lead to effective problem solving.
- (f) In the light of surrounding situations either as practically experienced or observed, learning should be situated for better appreciation of the factors responsible for the cause.
- (g) The teacher should encourage multiple perspectives and encourage diverse viewpoints based on individual thinking capabilities.

This framework provides a structured process for individuals to systematically reflect on their experiences, analyze their actions and emotions, and generate insights for future improvement. According to Boud, Cohen and Walker (2013), using such models helps in organizing thoughts and fostering a deeper understanding of one's experience. Reflective writing strategy enhanced critical thinking, self-awareness, and improves academic achievement and interest towards learning (Moon, 2013; Boud, Cohen & Walker, 2013).

Researchers have affirmed that there is a significant effect of reflective writing strategy on students' achievement in composition writing (Siti, Nia & Dahlya, 2017; Narges & Behdokht, 2015). Butar's (2021) study found that reflective essay writing strategy improves students' writing skills. Firdaus, Ismailianig and Sunardi's (2017) finding revealed that there is a significant effect of reflective journal writing on students' writing

ability. Abdul and Akhmad (2024) found a significant effect of reflective journaling writing strategy on students' writing skills. Sabooni and Salechi (2015) also reported a significant effect of reflective learning portfolio on students' performance in writing. However, Yousef and Sara's (2020) finding revealed no significant effect of reflective writing on students' performance in writing. This shows that there is mixed findings in literature on the use of reflective writing strategy on students' performance in composition writing. It was also observed that there is paucity of information on reflective reflective writing strategy on students' performance in writing composition in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. This creates a void in the literature that needs to be filled.

Apart from reflective writing and students' achievement in writing, students' interest play a very important role in learning writing. According to Baudino (2009), interest is the quality which arouses concern or curiosity and holds a student's attention on learning. It is an important form of motivation which manifests itself in several ways, including active engagement, focusing of one's attention and learning more than one would learn. In Nigeria, students have low interest in writing which lead to poor academic achievement (Adegbile & Alabi, 2011). According to Bruning and Horn (2000), reflective writing strategy may help to increase interest and reduce writing anxiety. Many mechanisms have been proposed to explain how reflective writing strategy foster greater students' interest in composition writing. Such mechanisms are metacognitive awareness, autonomy and ownership and improved self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bandura, 1997).

Many researchers found a significant effect of reflective writing strategy on students' interest in composition writing (Farrell, 2018; Akbari, 2017). Smith and Jones (2021) found a significant effect of reflective writing strategy on students' interest in composition writing. Graham, Harris and Mason's (2015) study result showed that students who engage in reflective writing reported significantly higher interest in writing composition. In a study involving 99 first-year

natural sciences students of Jimma University in the South-Western part of Oromiya in Ethiopia, Deti, Ferede and Tirneh (2023) investigated how reflection-supported learning of writing affects students' writing attitudes and achievement goal orientations. Using quasi-experimental design, the researchers constituted two groups –experimental and control, using the reflection-supported learning on the experimental group. At post-test following intervention, the result of the analysis proved that the experimental group outperformed the control group on the two dependent variables of attitude and achievement. Feeling satisfied with the result of the experiment, Deti, Ferede and Tirneh (2023) argued that reflection-supported learning of writing is a more effective method of writing instruction. It therefore, becomes imperative to investigate if the use of reflective writing strategy could increase SS 2 students' interest to and achievement in writing composition in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State.

Statement of the Problem

There is continuous outcry by stakeholders in education and the entire public about students' persistent unimpressive performance in composition writing in both internal and external examinations. This could be attributed to ineffective strategies that are adopted in the teaching of composition writing which has made students to develop poor writing skills. Such strategies teach writing as a product and not as a process (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013) and may not have been effective at improving students' interest to, and performance in writing in composition writing.

The problem of poor performance in composition writings can largely be blamed on students' negative interest towards writing (Adegbile & Alabi, 2011). This has affected their motivation to learn to write essay and usually consider it as a complex task. Such students may not communicate coherently and meaningfully in writing. They may find it difficult to write.

The continual and unabated unimpressive performance of students in writing suggests that there is a problem. This ugly trend among Nigerian students in general and Makurdi Local

Government Area of Benue State in particular, has necessitated this research effort considering the importance of writing in education and human development. It has become imperative to identify and adopt effective strategies that may enhance students' interest to writing and develop their proficient writing skills. As a result, reflective writing strategy was advocated. The problem of this study is, will the use of reflective writing strategy could increase SS 2 students' interest to and achievement in writing composition in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What will be the difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy?
2. What will be the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy.

Research Method

The design for this study was quasi-experimental research design. The design is also called non-equivalent (pre-test and post-test) control group design. This was done in line with the view of Emaikwu (2013) that in a school situation, schedules cannot be done away with, in order to accommodate a research work. In such cases, it becomes necessary to use groups as they were

already organised into classes (intact classes). The target population of this study comprises 1,655 (888 male and 767 female) senior secondary two (SS2) students for the 2022/2023 academic session in public secondary schools in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State (Directorate of Planning, Research and Statistics, Benue State Teaching Service Board, Makurdi, 2022).

The sample size of this study consisted of 91 senior secondary students located in two intact classes drawn from two public co-educational secondary schools. Public co-educational secondary schools were used for reason of uniformity in terms of using students who were exposed to similar standard of education. Simple random sampling technique was used. This technique was used to eliminate any element of bias in the selection.

Two research instruments were developed by the researcher and used for data collection. They were the Questionnaire on Students' Interest towards Composition Writing (QSACW), and Composition Writing Performance Test (CWPT). The QSACW was divided into two sections. Section A had 1 item while section B contained 20 items. Section A sought to know the gender of the students. Section B concerned to elicit responses from students regarding their interest towards composition writing. The QSACW items were structured on a 4-point Likert Scale with equal number of positive and negative items. The order of the scale ranged from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), to Strongly Disagree (SD). In collating the data, the rating scale were 4 SA, 3 A, 2 D, and 1 SD for the positive items while the negative items were rated in a reverse order. The CWPT consisted of two sections. Section A obtained personal information about the respondents while section B comprised five composition questions. The questions were on descriptive, narrative, expository and argumentative essays and letter writing. Each student was expected to answer one question. The items were scored out of 50 marks. Content, organisation, mechanical accuracy were marked out of 10 marks each while expression was scored out of 20 marks and the SCWPT was marked using a marking guide.

Ten Composition Writing Lesson Plans (CWLPs) were developed by the researcher and used for instruction in the study. Both experimental and control groups were exposed to the same number of lesson plans. The students in experimental group were exposed to CWLPs that were developed based on the reflective writing strategy while the students in control group were exposed to lesson plans developed based on the conventional discussion method.

Questionnaire on Students' Interest towards Composition Writing (QSACW), Composition Writing Performance Test (CWPT) and Composition Writing Lesson Plans (CWLPs) were given to three experts for validation. They were asked to ascertain face and content validity and make other necessary observations. The reliability of the QSACW was calculated using Cronbach alpha. The SACWQ yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The reliability of CWPT was computed using Spearman Rank Correlation Coefficient and yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.85. This indicates that the instruments are reliable. This is in line with Akpa (2011) who posits that an instrument with a reliability coefficient of 0.55 to 0.99 is reliable for a research.

Two experienced SS2 English Language teachers in the selected schools were engaged and trained as research assistants. They were trained on how to teach composition writing using reflective writing strategy and the conventional strategy. The teacher for the experimental group was trained on how to teach composition writing using reflective writing strategy while the teacher for the control group was trained on how to teach composition writing with conventional strategy. Both research assistants for the experimental and the control groups were trained for three days of two hours per session on each of the days.

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of Co-variance (ANCOVA). ANCOVA is considered appropriate because intact classes were used and the researcher is not sure of the equivalence of such classes. This method of analysis removes the bias or likelihood that the intact classes are not homogeneous or equivalent

and controls the effect of intervening variables (Emaikwu, 2013).

Results

The results of the data analysis and interpretation were presented according to research questions and hypotheses for the study.

Research Question One

What will be difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy?

Table 1

Mean Interest Ratings and Standard Deviation for Students' taught Composition Writing using Reflective Writing Strategy and those taught using Conventional Strategy

Strategy		Pre-interest	Post-interest	Mean gain
Experimental	Mean	17.03	29.37	12.34
	N	50	50	
	SD	8.21	5.01	
Control	Mean	18.50	21.03	2.53
	N	41	41	
	SD	11.21	5.00	
Mean difference				9.81

Table 1 shows the pre-interest mean score of students in the experimental group as 17.03 with standard deviation of 8.21 and the control group had 18.50 with standard deviation of 11.21. At post-interest, the experimental group had a mean rating of 29.37 with 5.01 as standard deviation while the control group had a mean score of 21.03

and with 5.00 shown as standard deviation. The mean gain for the experimental group was 12.37 while the control group was 2.53. The difference in mean gain of the two groups was 9.81 in favour of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy.

Research Question Two

What will be the difference in the mean performance scores of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy?

Table 2

Mean Performance Scores and Standard Deviation for Students' taught Composition Writing using Reflective Writing Strategy and those taught using Conventional Strategy

Strategy		Pre-test	Post-test	Mean gain
Experimental	Mean	9.00	19.27	10.27
	N	50	50	
	SD	3.33	5.55	
Control	Mean	13.44	18.68	5.24
	N	41	41	
	SD	2.37	1.11	
Mean difference				5.03

Table 2 reveals the pre-test mean score of students in the experimental group as 9.00 with standard deviation of 3.33 and the control group had 13.44 with standard deviation of 2.37. At post-test, the experimental group had a mean score of 19.27 with 5.55 as standard deviation while the control group had a mean score of 18.68 and with 1.11

shown as standard deviation. The mean gain for the experimental group was 10.27 while the control group was 5.24. The difference in mean gain of the two groups was 5.03 in favour of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the mean interest ratings of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy.

Table 3: ANCOVA on Mean Interest Ratings of Students taught Composition Writing using Reflective Writing Strategy and those using Conventional Strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1165.296a	2	582.648	24.582	.000
Intercept	7334.970	1	7334.970	309.469	.000
Pretest	105.093	1	105.093	4.434	.040
Strategy	1104.710	1	1104.710	46.609	.000
Error	1374.704	88	23.702		
Total	40665.000	91			
Corrected Total	2540.000	90			

Table 3 reveals that $F(1, 60) = 46.60; p = 0.00 < 0.05$. Since the p-value (0.00) was less than the alpha level (0.05), the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught composition writing with reflective writing strategy and those taught

using conventional strategy was rejected. This means that there was a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy ($F = 46.60, p = 0.00 < 0.05$).

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in the mean performance scores of students taught composition using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy.

Table 4: ANCOVA on Mean Performance Scores of Students taught Composition Writing using Reflective Writing Strategy and those using Conventional Strategy

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	348.960a	2	174.480	16.132	.000
Intercept	678.162	1	678.162	62.703	.000
Pretest	341.164	1	341.164	31.544	.000
Strategy	185.277	1	185.277	17.131	.000
Error	951.765	88	10.816		
Total	33962.000	91			
Corrected Total	1300.725	90			

Table 4 reveals that $F(1, 90) = 17.13$; $p = 0.00 < 0.05$. Since the p-value (0.00) was less than the alpha level (0.05), the null hypothesis of no significant difference between the mean performance scores of students taught composition writing with reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy was rejected. This means that there was a significant difference between the mean performance scores of students taught composition writing with reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy ($F = 17.13, p = 0.00 < 0.05$).

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the data analysed. The results of the major variables of the study were discussed. The results were presented in line with the research questions that guided the study and null hypotheses that were tested.

The findings of this study revealed a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy. This implies that reflective writing strategy improves students' interest in composition writing. The likely explanation of the finding is that as students in reflective writing strategy foster greater engagement and motivation during writing process. This result aligns with the finding of Smith and Jones (2021) who found a significant effect of reflective writing strategy on students' interest in composition writing. This finding also agrees with Farrell, (2018) and Akbari (2017). These researchers found in their separate studies that reflective writing strategy enhanced students' interest in composition writing. The finding in this study corroborates with Graham, Harris and Mason (2015) who reported that reflective writing strategy had significant effect on students' interest in writing composition,.

The result of this study also revealed a significant difference between the mean interest ratings of students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy and those taught using conventional strategy. This means that reflective writing strategy can enhance students' performance in composition writing. This result is

in agreement with the finding by Butar (2021) who found that students taught composition writing using reflective writing strategy performed significantly better than their counterparts who were taught using conventional instructional strategy. This finding also agrees with Siti, Nia and Dahlya (2017) and Narges and Behdokht, (2015). These researchers found in their separate studies that reflective writing strategy enhanced students' achievement in writing better than conventional strategy. The finding in this study is similar with Firdaus, Ismalianig and Sunardi (2017) who reported a significant effect of reflective journal writing on students' writing ability.

Conclusion

This study revealed that reflective writing strategy is an effective strategy to increase students' interest to and achievement in composition writing. This means that the perennial unimpressive performance in and lack of interest in composition writing that has been reported among SS 2 students could likely be addressed if English language teachers adopt reflective writing strategy in teaching of writing.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, it was recommended among other things that:

1. English Language teachers should expose students to reflective writing strategy to improve their interest to and performance in composition writing.
2. Teacher training institutions like Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in universities should also train pre-service teachers on how to effectively use reflective writing strategy.

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