

Investigating the Effects of Methods with Linguistic Packages on Secondary School Students' Achievement and Attitudes in Expression in Essay Writing in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study investigated the effects of reading-writing, discussion and lecture methods combined with packages of linguistic inputs on secondary school students' academic achievements and attitudes in essay writing. Three research questions were generated and three hypotheses were raised from the research questions. The study was informed by the problem of mass failure in English Language by Nigerian Students as reported by many renowned scholars and parents. The hypotheses generated sought to test the effects of methods combined with packages of linguistic inputs on secondary school students' achievements in expression, attitude to essay writing and gender influence on students' performance in essay writing. Five hundred and twenty one students were selected from the one hundred and sixty three Senior Secondary Schools in Ekiti State. The students were taught for six weeks during which they were given pre-test and post-tests. The data generated were subjected to Analyses of Covariance. The findings from the study show that, students taught with a package of linguistic inputs had the best result in expression in essay writing. It was recommended that teachers should take the advantages provided by reading-writing method and use them in teaching essay writing in the secondary schools.

INTRODUCTION

Nigerian students learn English Language as a second Language at all levels of school academic programmes. This implies that they had acquired their mother tongues with which they use to communicate effectively. That is, they have attained a reasonable level of competency in their mother tongue. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with more than four hundred languages. English language is used as official language. It is the language of commerce and interpersonal communication across ethnic groups. It is the medium of instruction in schools at all levels. The language is an instrument of unity among multilingual people.

The National policy on education (2004) in Nigeria states that the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community is to be used for instruction in the first three years of primary education. This means an intensive programme of consolidation of the audio-oral skills of the mother tongue, gradual development of a dialogist use at home and school, varieties of the mother tongue, a step by step development of the skills of reading and writing in the mother

tongue study and the expression domains of mother tongue use in terms of register. English Language is then expected to be introduced as a subject right from the first year of schooling and to become the language of instruction from the third year. The learners are expected to have acquired the basic oracy and literacy skills needed for continuing formal education and interactions in a situation in which English is the official language and at the end of the primary school education.

In recent years, parents and researchers are complaining about the poor performances of students in English language at both primary and secondary schools. Studies carried out by scholars like Ubahakwe (1991), Obemeata (1995), Ohia and Adeosun (2002) among others, identify a variety of factors as responsible for what is commonly referred to as the fallen standard of English. Some of the relevant factors to this study as identified by these scholars are:

- i. Inappropriate pedagogy employed in schools as it relates to the learners interests and needs.
- ii. Teaching not directed to the attainment of the goals and purposes of the target language.
- iii. The wide disparity between the language of

the curriculum, the English class and the Nigerian society.

The use of English language by Nigerian students, has been decried and described as very bad therefore this study investigates the effect of teaching methods in combination with a package of linguistic inputs designed to aid students in expressing their ideas when writing essays and when engaging in oral communication. Specifically, the study investigates the effect of reading-writing, lecture and discussion methods each combined with a package of linguistic inputs on students' achievement and attitude in essay writing in the senior secondary school class two in Nigeria. The package of linguistic input is made up of ,

- i. Grammatical rules, tenses, number comparison
- ii. Lexis- the use of dictionary, idioms, collocation and their levels of usage.
- iii. Syntax: sentence variety-simple, complex and compound; clause: noun clause, adverbial clause and relative clause.
- iv. Phrase and stylistic problems- wordiness, punctuation marks, types of paragraph and paragraph development, definition and types and hints on essay writing.

Statement of the Problem

Various research reports have shown that Nigerian students are poor users of English language hence mass failure are recorded in English language in public examinations conducted by examination bodies such as: West African Examinations Council, National Examinations Council, and Joint Admission and Matriculation Board. Also scholars like Obemeata (1995) Ubahakwe (1991) found that the problem of learning essay writing in Nigerian schools is compounded by teachers' inability to improvise the necessary enrichment materials that can stimulate the desired intellectual development in writing. This has been held responsible for the inability of students to generate ideas for essay topics and present such ideas in acceptable expressions. Others research work like Iyagba (1993), Kolawole (1998), Obemeata (1995), Ajayi (2002) confirmed that the students' performance is dwindling. This also buttresses the complaint of the parents that their wards are poor users of English language.

As a result of the problems stated above, it is important to find out what is responsible for these

problems. Perhaps the problems are the methods used by the teachers, which could not encourage the students to do well in essay writing. The following general questions are therefore raised.

- i. Are the students failing English Language because they cannot express their ideas fluently in English language when writing essays?
- ii. Are the students failing English Language because they cannot express their ideas in coherent thoughts convincingly when writing essays?
- iii. Are the students failing English language because of the methods of teaching employed by the Language teachers?

Research Questions

In order to find solutions to the problems stated above, the following research questions were raised.

1. Will students taught with reading – writing, lecture and discussion methods all combined with a package of linguistic inputs perform better in English language expression in essay writing than those not so treated?
2. Will gender have any influence on the performance of students in expression when they are taught with reading –writing, lecture and discussion methods combined with a package of linguistic inputs?
3. Is there any difference in the attitude of the students to essay writing before and after being instructed with reading –writing, discussion, lecture methods and the control group?

Research Hypotheses

As a result of the research questions above, the following research hypotheses were generated for the study. These hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- i. There is no significant difference in the post test expression scores in essay writing of students taught with reading –writing and those taught with discussion, lecture methods or the control group.
- ii. There is no significant difference between the attitude score of the students instructed with reading – writing, discussion and lecture methods and the control group before and after the treatment.
- iii. There is no significant difference in the

gender influence on the performance of the students taught with reading writing, lecture and discussion combined with a package of linguistic inputs and control group in essay writing.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the effects of teaching method earlier stated in this study on the achievement; attitude and gender influence on secondary school students in expressing their ideas when writing composition.

Literature Review

One of the importance of teaching language in Nigerian schools is to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively when speaking or writing. Essay writing is one of the means through which students' ability to express their ideas are examined. It is therefore one of the courses in the language classroom instructions in which students are taught writing and speaking skills. The thrust of this study is expression through writing skills.

In order to realize the purpose of the study, the researcher employed three strategies namely: reading-writing, lecture and discussion to teach essay writing with a view to improving students' performance in expression. If students' expression is to be improved, the method of presenting materials to them must be improved.

The method of interest is reading - writing method combined with a package of linguistic inputs. This method is based on the principle of the behaviourist which holds that language learning is a kind of habit formation and therefore emphasizes the act of drilling or stimulating learner to a point at which they can react to language stimuli spontaneously. This method produces learners with materials which are relevant to the topics of the essays they are to write in the class. This is followed by a brief discussion and writing exercises, draft and real writing by the students under the guidance of the language teacher. The students are not to copy the materials presented to them. The material is just to guide the students to generate their own similar or different ideas. This is similar to activity method of teaching essay writing. Iyagba (1993) used reading-writing method among the junior secondary school students and found the method better than discussion method

that is not accompanied with materials. Kolawole (1998) also used activity method among senior secondary school students and found it more effective than the discussion method on the general performance of students. The present study is different from the two above because it uses a combination of linguistic inputs with reading-writing, discussion and lecture methods as distinct methods with emphasis on their influence on the students' expression in essay writing. Ajayi (2002) also discovered that students who were taught to read relevant portions of news paper were able to generate ideas and express the ideas in desirable sentences when writing similar topics.

On the attitude of students, many Nigerian teachers have observed that Nigerian students have relatively poor attitude to reading. The reading culture is poor because there are many distractions. Personal and teachers observation through a survey of senior secondary school students reading culture carried out by the researcher in 2006, showed that most students prefer watching video films and browsing to reading English language or writing essay individually. Kolawole (2005) supporting the findings of Ezeokoli (1998) that many Nigerian students performed below expectation because they lacked some reading skills required for effective study and that was one of the factors responsible for their poor reading habit. It is difficult to develop a habit without practice. Students have to practise essay writing and speak English language in order to be proficient users of it as second language learners. Inability to practise speaking and writing skills is a hindrance to greater achievements and correct usage of English language. Kolawole (1998) in a study found that there was a significant difference between the attitudes of the students before they were treated with new methods. He also found that there was no significant difference in the attitude of the students to writing as a result of the treatment.

This study concentrates on the ability of the students to express their ideas on the contents generated during essay writing unlike other similar researches cited which concentrated on overall performance of students in essay writing.

METHODOLOGY

The research design is a quasi-experimental study, which involves, pre-test, post-test and control group design. Intact classes were randomly

assigned to different treatment conditions. The primary method of interest is reading-writing method combined with a package of linguistic inputs which is also combined with lecture and discussion methods respectively

Population

The population of the study is the senior secondary schools students in Ekiti State There were about, 1957 students in the 173 secondary schools spread across the sixteen local Governments in Ekiti State.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for the study comprise 521 secondary school class two students drawn from schools which were randomly selected through stratified random sampling procedure. The samples were male and female students. Intact classes were used for the study.

Instruments

Three different instruments were constructed for the study. They are:

- i. questionnaire on students' attitude to composition writing (SACW).
- ii. instructional package: linguistic inputs (LIN).
- iii. achievement tests in composition writing (ATEC).

Lesson guide was also drawn to enhance the teaching of essay writing in the Senior Secondary Schools.

Validation of the Instrument

The instruments were given to Language specialists at the University of Ado-Ekiti to establish the face and content validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

The reliability of the research instruments were carried out by teaching one hundred and twenty senior secondary school students who were not taking part in the main study for two weeks using the instruments constructed for the study. The students were given pre-tests before the commencement of the treatment and also they were allowed to fill the questionnaire on their attitudes towards essay writing. The students

were later given post test treatment in achievement test and were allowed to fill questionnaire on their attitude to essay writing after the treatment. The data collected during the reliability test were subjected to Pearson product moment correlation co-efficient. The result yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.75, 0.85 and 0.65 on the questionnaire on students' achievements, instructional package, Linguistic inputs and achievement tests in composition respectively.

Administration of the Instruments

The researcher visited the schools and administered pre-tests on the students who were selected for the study. The experimental groups were taught for six weeks after which they were given post tests. During the experimental session, the students in the experimental group were exposed to essay writings using different methods planned for the study in addition to packages of linguistic inputs which will enhance the students' ability to write good sentences. The control group were allowed to continue with their normal lessons which of course include essay writings and grammar.

Data Analyses

The data generated during the experimental sessions were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Scheffe's post -hoc Analysis where significance difference was established. The hypotheses were significant at 0.05 level.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: This states that, there is no significant difference in the post test expression scores in essay writing of students taught with a combination of package of linguistic inputs with reading -writing, discussion and lecture methods or the control group. The results of the data analysed are shown in tables 1a, 1b and 1c respectively.

The inferential statistics employed are summarised in the tables 1b and 1c.

Table 1a is a descriptive analyses which indicates that reading -writing methods (E1) seems to have the highest means of 6.90 followed by the lecture method (E3) 4.63 the control group has a mean of 3.72 and discussion method (E2)

Table 1a: Summary of mean post test scores of students in expression in essay writing

Group	Mean	Standard deviation	N
Reading-writing	6.90	1.88	124
Discussion	3.70	1.93	135
Lecture	4.63	1.66	132
Control	3.7	1.28	130
Total	4.7	2.14	521

has 3.70. The students exposed to discussion method seems to perform very poorly, even worse than the control group, perhaps some of the students did not take active part in the group work. Also, some of the members of the group may hide their ideas from their colleagues. Therefore, they were unable to identify or generate adequate content. Discussion is not part of the culture of some societies in Africa because the young ones are not allowed to take part in discussions with adults rather, they take instructions from adults. This perhaps affected the development of attitude to discussion by youths. From the table it seems that the control group performed homogeneously than other groups with

standard deviation of 1.28. It could be concluded that the discussion group performed worst and its performance is more spread than the other groups, while reading-writing seems to perform best because its means is above the total means, this is followed by the lecture method group with a mean of 4.63

Table 1b shows the value of F. for group method effect which was found to be 98.473 with df (3.516) significant at .000 level, which therefore was significant at $\alpha = 0.05$. The null hypothesis 1 was rejected. It was concluded that there was significant methods effect, that is, there was significance difference in the expression scores and achievements of students taught with reading –writing, discussion, lecture methods and the control group

Table 1c reveals that the overall post treatment achievement scores of students in Expression in essay writing was the highest in reading –writing method when compared with discussion method and was found to be significant at 0.05 level). The difference between reading-writing method and control group was found to be significant

Table 1b: ANCOVA summary for effects of instruction reading- writing, discussion, lecture methods and the control group on expression. Post Test Scores

Source	TYPE III sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square	F	Significant level
Corrected model	863.267 ^a	4	215.817	73.866	.000
Intercept	1464.314	1	1464.314	501.178	.000
Pre-test (Covariate) (Expression)	.647	1	.647	.222	.638
Group	863.139	3	287.713	98.473	.000
Error	1507.615	516	2.922		
Total	13892.000	521			
Corrected total	2370.887	520			

Table1c: Post hoc tests of multiple comparison analysis using Scheffe methods on expression post test scores

Groups for study	(j) Groups for study	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Significant	95% confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Reading-writing	Discussion	3.20*	0.21	0	-3.8	-2.6
	Lecture	2.27*	0.21	0	1.68	2.87
	Control	3.19*	0.21	0	2.59	3.79
Discussion	Reading-writing	-3.20*	0.21	0	-3.8	-2.6
	Lecture	-.93*	0.21	0	-1.51	-0.34
	Control	-1.17 ^E .02	0.21	0	-0.6	-0.58
Lecture	Reading-writing	-2.27*	0.21	0	-2.87	-1.68
	Discussion	-.93*	0.21	0	-.34	1.51
	Control	.91*	0.21	0	0.32	1.51
Control	Reading-writing	-3.19*	0.21	0	-3.79	-2.59
	Discussion	-1.17 ^E .02	0.21	0	-0.58	0.6
	Lecture	.91*	0.21	0	-1.51	-.32

(mean difference 3.19 significant at 0.05 level) in other words, the difference in post treatment achievement score of students in expression between reading-writing and discussion method was the widest while the difference in post-treatment achievement score of student in expression between the students taught with reading-writing method and lecture method was the closest.

Hypotheses II states that there is no significant difference between the attitude score of the students instructed with reading – writing, discussion and lecture methods and the control group before and after the treatment.

The inferential statistics employed is as shown on table 2b.

Table 2a on subjects' attitude to essay writing seems to suggest that the subjects' attitude are almost the same because there are slight differences in the means of each of the dependent variable, although, the table seems to suggest that attitude of reading-writing method group is the best because the groups means of 74.88 is slightly above the total mean of 74.59. Also from the table, the control group is the most heterogeneous with standard deviation of 14.34 while the discussion group is the most homogenous with standard deviation of 10.61.

Table 2b shows that the pre-test scores of the attitude of the students had (df) of (1,510) with F. calculated as 3.204, which was significant at 0.05 level suggesting that there was significant difference

in the pre-test attitude of the subjects in all the four groups before the treatment. The same table also shows that the value of F for group method effect was .091 with (df) (3,500) with F less than .965 which shows that there was no significant difference in the attitude of the students after the treatment.

Hypotheses III states that there is no significant difference on the gender influence on the performance of students taught with reading-writing, lecture and discussion methods combined with a package of linguistic inputs and control group in expression in essay writing.

Table 3 shows that there is significant difference between the performance of male and female students taught with reading-writing, lecture while there was no significant difference in the performance of male and female students in the discussion group methods in expression in essay writing. This is shown by the table as reading – writing has F calculated as .585 significant at .446 while discussion and control group show no significant difference because F .229 significant at .586 and the control group has its F. as .042 significant at .838 respectively. The lecture method has its F-test as .789 significant at .376.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that there was a significant difference in the achievement mean scores of the experimental group I and 3 reading-writing (E1), lecture (E3) and the control group while that of Experimental group 2 (discussion) was lower than the control group in the ability of students to express their ideas in meaningful and coherent sentences. Experimental group one (reading –writing E1), had the highest mean, followed by experimental group three (lecture method) (E3). It therefore, shows that the combination of linguistic inputs and reading –

Table 2a: Dependent variable students' attitude post test mean scores

Group	Mean	Standard deviation	Number
Reading-Writing	74.88	11.53	124
Discussion	74.75	10.61	135
Lecture	74.64	14.31	132
Control	74.08	14.34	130
Total	74.59	12.72	521

Table 2b: Summary of ANCOVA for effects of methods of instruction (reading-writing, discussion and lecture methods) on students attitude to post test scores

Source	TYPE III sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square	F	Significant level
Corrected model	565.574 ^a	4	141.393	.873	.480
Intercept	102499.654	1	102499.654	633.152	.000
Attitude Pretest	518.729	1	518.729	3.204	.074
Group	44.226	3	14.742	.091	.965
Error	82562.795	510	161.888		
Total	948589.000	515			
Corrected total	83128.369	514			

Table 3: Gender Influence on the performance of students with reading –writing lecture and discussion methods in expression in essay writing

Source		Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean of square	F	Significant level
Reading-writing	Between groups	2.065	1	2.065	0.585	0.446
	Within groups	430.774	122	3.531		
	Total	432.839	123			
Discussion	Between groups	1.12	1	1.12	0.299	0.586
	Within groups	499.028	133	3.752		
	Total	500.148	134			
Lecture	Between groups	2.189	1	2.189	0.789	0.376
	Within groups	360.621	130	2.774		
	Total	362.811	131			
Control	Between groups	6.92E-02	1	6.92E-02	0.042	0.838
	Within groups		128	1.659		
	Total		129			

writing method is more instrumental to effective learning and achievement in Expression of ideas and thought in composition writing in English language. It was noted that the lecture method led the students to express their ideas and thoughts better than the discussion method (E2) contrary to expectations. This may happen where students in the discussion group fail to pay attention or do not take active part in the group discussion. This may adversely affect their performance

The finding on the effectiveness of the package of linguistic inputs and reading-writing method on the achievement of students in expression in essay writing gives further empirical support to the previous findings of Iyagba (1993) on the effectiveness of reading –writing method. The findings on the effectiveness of lecture methods and the package of linguistic inputs on student achievement discussed above, further supported the previous empirical research by scholars like Kolawole (1998) and Iyagba (1993) who found that the lecture method was more effective than the discussion method.

The results of the Analysis of covariance on table 1b confirmed that teaching methods had a significant main effect on variation in subjects expression and achievement scores. Also, the Scheffe multiple comparison Analysis table 1c showed that the reading –writing method had the highest means scores above the other two methods and the control group. This implies that reading writing method is the most superior of the three methods in students' achievements in expression in composition writing.

The findings of the study on the students' attitude shows that there was no significant difference in the attitude of the students after the

treatment in contrary to the statistical results which reflected significant difference in the attitude of the students before the study. The implication of this is that the methods of teaching investigated sensitized the students about expression in essay writing.

The findings of the study show that gender has influence on the performance of the students taught with reading-writing and lecture methods with the combination of a package of linguistic inputs. While gender has no significant effects on the performance of students taught with discussion method with a package of linguistic inputs and control group.

Implication for Teaching and Learning

This study has shown that if students were taught with good method of teaching and relevant linguistic inputs, they will be able to express their ideas in good sentences. The employment of combination of reading-writing method with package of linguistic input have shown that students exposed to this method were able to express their ideas and discuss both main and supporting points better than those students taught with lecture and discussion methods. This method is also suitable for the teaching of large number of students even in other subjects. In this case, teachers can provide relevant materials which will sensitize the students to think about what they have read and come out with their own ideas. The reading-writing method enhances students' ability to analyse, what they read, explain, amplify and evaluate writers' opinion. Teachers should use this method in order to improve students' performance.

CONCLUSION

The problem of mass failure in English Language in Nigeria and the need to urgently find solution to it necessitated this investigation into the methods used for teaching essay writing in our secondary schools. The investigation shows that the methods used by teachers to teach essay writing in the secondary schools are inadequate.

The study therefore investigated the effects of three methods namely reading–writing, lecture and discussion methods all combined with a package of linguistic inputs on the expression of students in essay writing. Based on the findings of this study it was concluded that students exposed to a package of linguistics inputs combined with reading-writing methods can express their ideas fluently and correctly when writing composition. It was also concluded that gender has influence on the performance of students in essay writing when they were taught with reading-writing and lecture method.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings of the study, it is recommended that teacher should use reading-writing method combined with packages of linguistic inputs to teach essay writing to the students especially in a large class.

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