



THE EFFECTS OF JOURNAL WRITING STRATEGY ON JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ESSAY WRITING PERFORMANCE IN EKITI STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the effects of journal writing strategy on junior secondary school students' essay writing performance in Ekiti State, Nigeria. A quasi-experimental research design was used which was classified into a quantitative research. The population for the study consisted of all Junior Secondary School II students, totaling 14,562 in 194 Junior Secondary Schools in 2018/2019 academic session in Ekiti State. Stratified random sampling was used to select 320 Junior Secondary School II students from eight Junior Secondary Schools from the 3 Senatorial Districts in Ekiti State. A self-structured instrument on students' English Performance Test (SEPT) was used for data collection. The face and content validity were ensured. Test-retest reliability method was used for the performance test to obtain reliability co-efficient of 0.71. The research question raised to guide the study was analyzed descriptively using mean and standard deviation. The two (2) hypotheses formulated for the study were tested inferentially using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that there was no significant difference in the pre-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups. It was also revealed that there was significant effect of journal writing strategy on junior secondary school students' writing performance before and after treatment. Based on the findings, appropriate recommendations were made.

Keywords: *Essay writing, Journal writing strategy, students' writing ability, students' performance.*



INTRODUCTION

English language is the official language in Nigeria and due to the multilingual nature of the country, it has become the major unifying factor while its usefulness in all sectors can never be quantified. Awonusi (2004) asserts that the long history of the use of English over the years allows it to go beyond the official while assimilation and functions often associated within native-speaker communities to provide functions, peculiar to the Nigerian environment i.e. as a medium of inter-ethnic communications.

Writing is one of the language skills. It is a productive, as well as an expressive skill and it is a very effective tool for communication. It is a means of communicating one's ideas, feelings and emotions and also a means of externalizing what has been internalized. Writing is both an act and an art. As an act, it involves the physical activity of the psychomotor domain, that is, the physical activity to use the physical hand when writing while as an art, it is cognitive because it involves the ability to compose what is written. Writing as an act and an art requires the correct use of the language of instruction that must convey meaning.

Writing as one of the four major skills in English language, alongside listening, speaking and reading, is an important skill that a learner of a language, such as English, must master in a proficient manner, to be able to excel in academic work (Olaofe, 2013 and Komang, Nyoman & Ni-Made, 2013). It is an essential element of communication since it gives the possibility, independent of time and space limitations to express thoughts and to combine views convincingly (Hann, Timmis, Alkhadi, Davis, Troncoso & Yi, 2014). Writing includes the capacity of narrative or descriptive to tell or to retell information in form of new text as it does in expository or argumentative essays. Information is translated into new text (Adegbile & Alabi, 2007). The works go from the simple mechanical or formal elements of writing down to a sophisticated composition act on the other side. Writing in Ogunyemi & Tunde-Awe (2020) is a key factor in the teaching and learning of the English language.

It is worthy to note that some students at all levels of education have problems with writing, especially in countries such as Nigeria, where English is a second language (L2); this no doubt creates problems for them especially in writing. The ability to write in English, is crucial and contributes to learner's proficiency in the language. Mgbodile (1999) submits that English language skills, especially proficiency in writing are essential to humanity and



are also evidence of global knowledge and civilization. Abdullahi (2010) further identifies the relevance and competence in spoken and written being vital for linguistic, national and socio-cultural reasons. These and other observations of excellent English language skills have general consequences, particularly since the language has a significant role in our social and economic development, for the subsequent pedagogical expectations of Nigerian children. In addition, Oyinloye (2014) writing is a constructive process and a means of externalizing what has been internalized or a construction of ideas from one's prior knowledge or imagination.

Essay writing attracts the highest marks obtainable in the subject while writing competence also assists one's achievement in other aspects like comprehension and summary writing. Students are expected to answer comprehension questions and summaries in correct sentences. Therefore, it is not surprising that the failure rate in essay writing culminates in failure in the subject's overall performance. Hence, Ogunyemi in Obateru (2018) submits that proficiency in writing is a sine qua non for students' academic success.

Journal Writing Strategy

Ofodu (2016) asserts that a journal is a book where a learner expresses a personal idea. Also, Onukaogu (2009) postulates that a journal may also be a collection of electronic correspondence between students who communicate via a computer. When maintaining a diary, it is important to feel free to express oneself and students are expected to write in first person - it is intended to be a personal story and a writer should usually write it from a first person viewpoint. This includes the use of the pronouns "I," "me," "mine," or "my" in sentences. Journal gives voice to dreams and aspirations. It is a creative medium and it is a way of giving one's feelings an outlet.

Journal writing helps enhance reading and writing skills for students since they study a subject broadly. It is very different from other kinds of writing since it is written on an ongoing basis in a school where students choose subjects they want to write about, depending on their interests and requirements. The teacher on the other hand, is an active collaborator who answers each journal item a pupil publishes or writes. If the time of



response is going to take a toll on the teacher, he or she may remark on entries in the student journal once a week or each week. In order to address the unique requirements and needs of students, journals (Santoso, 2012, Werderich, 2002 and Nassaji & Cumming, 2000) were utilized for individualized education.

Journal writing also offers students with opportunities to utilize a foreign language outside the confines of the classroom. (Savignon, 2002) says that their aim is to prepare students to utilize the second language in the world outside the diversity of communication activities. Journal writing also allows students to express themselves freely without fear of error.

It is observed that performance of students over the years has been consistently poor hence, there is an urgent need for new strategy to get the desired result in the performance of students. However, it is observed by the researcher that not much has been done on journal writing strategy as far as the writing skill is concerned, hence, the need for this study is of paramount importance.

Statement of the Problem

English language is a compulsory subject that is being offered in both junior and senior schools. The importance of this subject cannot be over emphasized as all other subjects are taught and examined in the English language and so students who possess a good skill in the language will find themselves succeeding both in official and social situations.

Essay writing on the other hand is an important aspect of the English language examination that out of the 100% allocated to English language, 50% goes to essay writing. It therefore means that failure in essay writing, invariably leads to failure in English. In spite of this revelations, the yearly poor performance of candidates in English language in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination, West African Examination Council and National Examination Council has become consistent to the extent that some students become frustrated due to their inability to gain admission to higher institutions.

The observed poor performance in writing seems to contribute to poor academic performance of students in English language and may likely be attributed to the method of



teaching adopted by the teacher. Moreover, the researcher observes that some school principals and teachers take the teaching of English language with levity hence, they assign any teacher other than English language specialists to handle it. A teacher does not qualify to teach an indigenous language just because he or she can speak it. Some students also believe the subject is so simple that it is not worth studying. Positive disposition leads to commitment which invariably leads to attainment of goals. This study is set out critically, to examine the effect of journal writing strategy on Junior Secondary School students' essay writing performance in Ekiti State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effects of journal writing strategy on Junior Secondary School students' essay writing performance in Ekiti State to this end, the specific objectives of the study were to:

- i. Examine the effects of journals writing techniques on the writing performance of Junior Secondary School students.
- ii. Investigate if there would be gender difference in the performance of Junior Secondary School students in English essay writing using journal writing strategy.

Research Question

The following research question was raised for this study:

What is the mean difference between the pretest and posttest in the experimental and control groups?

Research Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significant difference between the pre-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant effect of journal writing strategy on junior secondary school students' writing performance before and after treatment.



Methodology

The study adopted quasi experimental design of pre-test, post-test and control group design in which there was one experimental and one control group. The study examined the effect of journal writing on students' academic performance in essay writing in English language. The academic performance that was used for the study was established by pretests that were conducted on both experimental and the control groups to ascertain homogeneity of the sample. Post-tests after the treatment were used to measure improvement in academic performance.

The research design was as follows:

$O_1 \quad X_1 \quad O_2 \quad = \quad \text{Journal writing}$
 $O_3 \quad C \quad O_4 \quad = \quad \text{Control group}$

Where:

$O_1, O_3 =$ Pre-test observations
 $O_2, O_4 =$ Posttest observations
 $X_1 =$ Treatment with Journal writing
 $C =$ No treatment

This design was considered appropriate since it helped to check the effect of the variables and interaction effect on students' academic achievement in essay writing in English language.

The population for the study consisted of all Junior Secondary School II students in the 3 Senatorial Districts in Ekiti State. As at the time of conducting this research, there were 14,562 students in JSS 2, in 194 Junior Secondary Schools in Ekiti State, during 2018/2019 academic session (*Source*: Ekiti State Ministry of Education, Research and Statistics Department), from which 320 Junior Secondary School II students were selected as the sample for the study through multistage sampling technique.

A self-developed instrument on achievement test was used to establish the effectiveness of journal strategy on writing performance of Junior Secondary School II (JSS 2) students. The instrument used was Students' English Performance Test (SEPT) which was adapted from Junior Secondary School examination past questions. The face and content



validity were ensured. Test-retest reliability method was used for the performance test to obtain reliability co-efficient of 0.71.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and discussion of the study.

Demographics' Respondents by Gender

Table 1: Analysis of respondents by gender

S/N	Gender	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Male	170	53.1
2.	Female	150	46.9

Table 1 shows the analysis of the respondents with respect to their gender. It was shown that 170 male students which represented (53.1%) of the respondents participated in the study while the remaining 150 students which represented (46.9%) of the respondents were female students.

School location of the respondents

Table 2: Analysis of location of schools of the respondents

S/N	School Type	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Urban	200	62.5
2.	Rural	120	37.5

Table 2 shows the analysis of the respondents with respect to their location. It was shown that 200 students which represented (62.5%) of the respondents were selected from urban areas while the remaining 120 students which represented (37.5%) of the respondents were selected from rural areas.

Research Question

What is the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental and control groups?



To answer the question descriptively, the mean and standard deviation were used based on the responses of the students. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: The mean difference between the pretest and posttest in the experimental and control groups.

Strategies	Pre-test			Post-test		Mean Difference
	N	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Journal Writing	200	53.59	20.44	66.13	12.40	12.54
Conventional Group	120	54.21	19.07	58.01	11.67	3.80

The result in Table 3 on the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test in the experimental and control groups showed that students in the journal writing strategy group had performance mean of (53.59) with measure of variability of (20.44) before treatment while the control group had performance mean of (54.21) and measure of variability of (19.07). On exposure to treatment, students taught using journal writing strategy had performance mean of (66.13) with measure of variability of (12.40) while those in control group had performance mean of (58.01) and measure of variability of (11.67). The differences between the performances' mean before and after treatment also show the effect of journal writing strategy on students' writing performance. The mean difference of journal writing strategy group are (12.54) while control group had (3.80). The table shows that there was homogeneity among the groups during pretest stage and the use of the journal writing strategy had a positive effect on junior secondary school students' writing performance during the posttest stage.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the pre-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups.



In order to test the hypothesis, pre-test mean scores of the students in the experimental and control groups were computed and compared for statistical significance at 0.05 level. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: A Two-way Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Summary of pre-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups.

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: Post-test

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared	Observed Power ^b	Remark
Corrected Model	41118.024 ^a	3	106.021	3.011	.031	.095	.701	Not Sig.
Intercept	33059.917	1	159.922	37.36	.000	.282	1.000	
Pre-test	1747.511	1	187.411	5.087	.019	.047	.605	
Group	220.878	1	220.878	.622	.421	.006	.127	
Performance	28.418	1	28.418	.074	.718	.001	.060	
Group * Performance	.012	1	.012	.003	.001	.031	.001	
Error	26636.617	76	351.122					
Total	21075.000	80						
Corrected Total	34174.814	79						

a. R Squared = .096 (Adjusted R Squared = .067)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

Table 4 showed the result of the analysis of difference between the pre-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups. It was found that the variances for the students' performance are homogeneous ($F=0.074$, $p>0.05$). Based on this result, a two-way ANCOVA was conducted. It was found that $F(1, 76) = 0.003$, $p = 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 =$



0.31. Since 0.001 is less than 0.05 (at the 95% level of confidence), this implies that there is a statistically significant two-way interaction effect. This indicated that there was a significant difference between the pre-test mean scores of students in the experimental and control groups. Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant effect of journal writing strategy on junior secondary school students' writing performance before and after treatment.

In order to test the hypothesis, mean performance scores of students in the experimental group (those taught using journal writing strategy) and those in control group were computed and compared for statistical significance at 0.05 level. The result is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: ANOVA analysis showing students' performance score in writing ability in the experimental and control groups

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Group	221.378	2	120.629	3.917	0.011
Within Group	4135.400	158	30.647		
Total	6376.778	160			

P<0.05

The result in table 5 on ANOVA analysis test showing students' performance score in essay writing in the experimental (those exposed to journal writing strategy) and control groups. It was revealed that the significant value of the output (0.011) was less than the critical value of 0.05. As a result, it is concluded that there was significant effect of journal writing strategy on the writing ability of Junior Secondary School students. Hence, the null hypothesis was not upheld.



Discussion of Findings

The findings from the descriptive analysis of the study showed that there was homogeneity among the groups during pre-test stage and the use of the journal writing strategy had a positive effect on junior secondary school students' writing performance during the post-test stage. This indicated that performance of students in essay writing was predicated on their ability to represent their thought in writing, their ability to decode and internalize facts read from texts.

The inferential analysis of this study revealed that there was a significant effect of journal writing strategy on junior secondary school students' writing performance before and after treatment. This is in line with the submission of Alonge (2017) & Adamu (2009) that writing is one of those skills that resists mere memorization of a set of rules, since it requires the development and use of a variety of composite abilities throughout the writing process. Also, journal writing is a tool for self- improvement which gives voice to students' dreams and aspirations and also a creative medium and a way of giving one's feelings an outlet, which also supports the position of Henry (2014) who postulates that not only does regular writing makes you feel good, it helps you relive the events you experienced in a safe environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that, the performances of students in essay writing in the journal writing were homogeneous at the commencement of the experiment. The use of journal writing strategy enhanced better performance of students in essay writing among junior secondary school students.

It is recommended that the use of journal writing strategy should be encouraged in teaching essay writing in junior secondary schools so as to enhance better academic performance of students in essay writing. Also, English language teachers should be given adequate orientation, training and re-training through workshops and seminars to update their knowledge in the use of journal writing strategy in teaching.



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