

Effects of Conference Method on the Performance of Senior Secondary School Students in Generation of Ideas in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract. Writing is a major skill students require to function efficiently in school and out of school. This study investigated the effects of the conference method on the performance of senior secondary school students in generation of ideas in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The research was motivated by the poor performance of senior students in written composition. The research design employed was a quasi-experimental design that utilised the non-equivalent control group design. The sample of the population for the study comprised eighty students randomly drawn from two public schools out of the 3,433 senior secondary one students in 20 Government public secondary schools in the Local Government Area. The sample was randomly assigned to experimental and control groups. Two test items, Expository Composition Writing Test (ECWT) and Narrative Composition Writing Test (NCWT) were developed and validated by the researcher and used to collect data for the research. The data collected were analysed using mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics. The results indicated that there was a significant difference between the mean score achievement of the experimental and control groups in generation of ideas. It was recommended, based on the findings of the research that the conference method should be adopted by teachers of English Language to teach written

composition and English teachers should focus on specific writing skills.

1. Introduction

Writing is a set of visible signs used to represent units of language in a systematic way, with the purpose of recording messages which can be retrieved by everyone who knows the language in question and the rules by virtues of which its units are encoded in the writing system. Individuals, societies and nations all over the world attach a lot of importance to writing considering its usefulness. As populations grew and societies formed, writing became a useful tool to help people keep track of things. It leads to effective survival in the society and draws the most distinct line between a civilised and an uncivilised society.

Written composition which is synonymous with writing is traceable to the evolution of writing. It is writing that entails the logical planning and ordering of different ideas under a unifying idea in order to communicate effectively. Written composition plays vital roles in the educational system. It contributes to intellectual development of students as it requires the analysis and synthesis of information. It also develops initiative by requiring that the student

supplies everything him/herself. Also, it increases students' personal knowledge and self-esteem and encourages learning in all subject areas by employing auditory, visual and kinesthetic systems at once. It contributes significantly to improvement of students' reading skills, vocabulary application, and therefore, their speaking skills. It develops in students the ability to brainstorm on ideas, generate ideas, organise and develop them meaningfully.

As important as written composition is, it is poorly taught in schools in Nigeria. Emphasis is not placed on equipping students with the necessary writing skills that will make them proficient writers, rather attention is given to the end product, that is, students' written compositions. Written composition is a vital skill that requires careful teaching and learning. A written composition is made up of a number of paragraphs that develop and support a central idea, impression, or point (Anderson, 2005). A properly written composition is carefully structured and contains particular parts that work together to communicate the writer's main ideas. It begins with a central idea (topic) on which minor ideas are generated for its development. The ideas are organised appropriately and stated in effective and well punctuated sentences which are grouped to form coherent and unified paragraphs that communicate the writer's thoughts.

The effective development of these skills is hinged upon an appropriate writing approach that is student centered and integrative. The conference method being highlighted in this study is an off-shoot of the process approach. Murray (1981) pointed out that the conference method involves the teacher and the writer (student) in a continuing process of evaluating the student's writing through student self-examination with the teacher as a reader. Conferencing does not necessarily mean the teacher is the only person the writer writes for. Rather, student-teacher conference evolves into student-to-student conferences. Through writing conferences such as group, peer and individual, student writers are exposed to the practical method of writing. The conference method is

student-centered, interactive and integrative. It provides a non-threatening atmosphere for students as it creates confidence in them. It helps students to take charge of their writing, evaluate their own writing and the writing of their peers and exposes them realistically to the stages of writing. It is against this background that this study aims at investigating the effects of the conference method on senior secondary students' performance in generation of ideas in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State.

1.1 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to determine the effects of conference method on the performance of senior secondary school students in generation of ideas in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The specific objective of the study was to:

- Determine the effect of conference method on SS1 students' generation of ideas in written composition.

1.2 Research Question

One research question was raised to guide the study:

- What is the pre-test and post-test mean score performance of the experimental and control groups in generation of ideas?

1.3 Hypothesis

One hypothesis was formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

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

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study made use of quasi experimental research design. There were two groups in the design which were not composed on the basis of randomization but on the bias of using intact groups. These intact groups were not composed by the researcher but by the schools and the researcher were not permitted to randomise and assign them in order not to disorganise the schools' activities.

2.2 Participants

The target population for this study comprised all the 3,433 senior secondary one students in Government Secondary Schools in Jos North Local Government Area of Plateau State. The study sample comprised eighty (80) SS1 students purposively drawn from two government secondary schools, that is, forty (40) from each school. The forty students were further divided into twenty (20) each for experimental and control groups, respectively. The decision to choose SS1 students for this study was guided by two reasons. They were a fresh senior class that was matured enough to undergo the study. More so, SS1 students were in the fourth year in senior secondary school so would have some useful previous knowledge of writing skills that would enable them participate effectively in the study. It was hoped that the training programme prepared for the experimental group would be of immense benefit to their learning of English Language. Whatever deficiencies that would be noticed in their performance would be remedied before their senior school certificate examinations.

2.3 Instruments for Data Collection

Two instruments were used in this study. They were Narrative Composition Writing Test (NCWT) and Expository Composition Writing

Test (ECWT). The researcher developed these two test items based on the two instruments: one narrative item and one expository item. The items consisted of the same two pre-test questions and two post-test questions. All the two test items were within writing ability of the students and their knowledge. They were developed based on the types of questions in Senior English Project for Secondary Schools, Book 1.

2.4 Procedure

After visiting the two purposively selected schools and granted permission, the researcher sought the assistance of four English Language teachers, two in each of the schools to serve as research assistants. They underwent a training for three days. They assisted the researcher in teaching the experimental and control groups, test administration and scoring. All the lessons during the intervention were held according to the schools' scheduled time table. Both experimental and control groups received a total of twelve lessons lasting forty (40) per single period and eighty (80) minutes per double periods accordingly. The intervention lesson lasted for six weeks, two weeks were for pre-test and post-test and four weeks for the treatment. The pre-test aimed at ascertaining the entry ability of the participants while the post-test examined the efficacy of the treatment. The test items comprised two written composition questions: one was a narrative and the second was an expository one. The items test the participants' knowledge of generation of ideas.

2.5 Method of Data Analysis

The mean and standard deviation were used to answer all the research questions posed for the study. Similarly, t-test statistics were used to test the hypotheses that were formulated to guide the study. This was carried out at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

3. Results

Research Question: What is the pre-test and post-test mean scores achievement of the experimental and control groups in generation of ideas?

Table 1: Mean scores and standard deviation of respondents in the test for generation of ideas.

Group		N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental	Pre-test	40	6.20	1.16
	Post-test	40	10.94	1.32
Control	Pre-test	40	6.14	1.80
	Post-test	40	6.16	1.46
Total		80		

Table 1 indicates the performance of the experimental and control groups in the test for generation of ideas. The analysis shows that in the pre-test, the experimental group had a mean score of 6.20 and standard deviation of 1.16, while the control group scored a mean of 6.14 standard deviation of 1.80. The result indicated that both the experimental and control groups performed poorly in the test for idea generation. However, at the post-test, the experimental group had a mean score of 10.94 and standard deviation of 1.32, while the control group scored a mean of 6.16 and standard deviation of 1.46. The result showed that the experimental group improved significantly in the post-test while the control group performed poorly. The implication is that the treatment improved the experimental group's idea generation skill.

Hypothesis

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

Table 2: T-test Analysis of Experimental and Control Groups' Pre-test Mean Scores in Generation of Ideas.

Group	N	Mean	Std	t-cal	Df	P	Decision
Experimental	40	7.05	1.67	-0.813	78	0.419	Accepted
Control	40	7.38	1.90				

Table 2 shows the experimental and control groups' pre-test mean scores performance in generation of ideas. The analysis indicates that the experimental group has a mean score of 7.05 while the control group has 7.38 respectively and the standard deviation for the experimental group is 1.67 and 1.90 for the control group. The t-calculated is -0.813 with the degree of freedom of 78. The p-value is 0.419 indicating that the p-value is not significant; therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3: T-test Analysis of Experimental and Control Groups' Mean Scores Post-Test Performance in Generation of Ideas.

Group	N	Mean	Std	t-cal	Df	P	Decision
Experimental	40	12.51	1.25	15.475	78	0.000	Rejected
Control	40	7.75	1.49				

The post-test mean scores analysis of experimental and control groups in idea generation is presented in table 3. The analysis shows that the experimental group has a mean of 12.51 while the control group has 7.75. The standard deviation for the experimental group stands at 1.25 and 1.49 for the control group. The t-calculated is 15.475 with the degree of freedom of 78. The p-value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, indicating that the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning there is a significant difference in the post-test performance between the experimental and control groups in generation of ideas.

4. Discussion

The study employed the pre-test-post-test quasi design to test the participants' written composition prowess before and after the treatment. Eighty (80) students drawn from two Plateau State Government Secondary Schools participated in the study. They were randomly grouped into forty (40) for experimental and forty (40) for control groups respectively in each of the two schools. The two groups were pre-tested and post-tested and the results provided the data that were used to answer the five research questions and five hypotheses respectively.

The participants' responses to research question 1 which tested their pre-test and post-test mean scores on generation of ideas were analysed. The result indicated that both experimental and control groups had mean scores of 6.20 and 6.14 respectively. This implied that the two groups performed poorly in generation of ideas before the intervention. However, in the post-test which was conducted after the treatment, the experimental group obtained a mean score of 10.94, while the control group scored 6.16. The result indicated that the experimental group improved significantly due to their exposition to the treatment. On the other hand, the control group that was not exposed to the treatment still performed poorly. This means that the experimental group's improvement justifies the usefulness of the conference method in teaching the skills generation of ideas.

Furthermore, the hypothesis formulated to guide the study was tested, using t-test statistical tools and the responses of the participants were carried out at 0.05 alpha level. The participants sat for pre-test before the commencement of the treatment. The analysed performances of the experimental and control groups to answer the hypotheses were discussed under N (number of participants), Standard deviation (Sd), T-calculated (t-cal), Degree of Freedom (Df), p-value (P) and Decision (whether to accept or reject the hypotheses). The pre-test results are contained in table 2. The result showed that all the null hypotheses were accepted since the p.value of all the results were greater than the stated level of significance of 0.05. The implication is that the participants could not demonstrate any appreciable knowledge of the composition writing skill of generation ideas.

The poor performance of the two groups in the pre-test was enough justification for the conduct of the study through the exposure of the experimental group to the treatment. At the end of the treatment, the post-test was administered on both the experimental and control groups. The analysed results of the participants in the writing skill tested are contained in table 3. The result of the experimental group indicated that the null hypothesis tested at 0.05 level of significance was rejected as the p.value was less than 0.05. This showed that there was a significant difference between the mean score performances of the experimental and control groups in the post-test. Even in the post-test, the control group still performed poorly since the members were not exposed to the treatment. It is necessary to infer from the results that the conference method would be useful to teach written composition skills to students in order to make them become proficient writers. As a result of the exposure of the experimental group to the treatment, the approach of the members to written composition differed greatly from their previous approach at the pre-test. They could generate ideas sufficiently through individual, peer and group brainstorming. The generated points were in line with the scoring criteria. This finding collaborates Urzua (1987) and Mahon and Yau (1997)'s findings that the conference

method could improve students' a generation of ideas.

5. Conclusion

The results of the study have proved that the conference method of teaching written composition makes more significant improvement on students in writing skills and competencies. The conference method which is learner centered enables students to take charge of their written composition pieces at the pre-writing, writing and post-writing stages of composition writing. The method discourages teacher centered method of teaching written composition which does not allow students' active participation in written composition. It is necessary to observe that in conference writing, the teacher does not communicate knowledge but prod students' memory, stimulates the knowledge already acquired and creates the enabling learning environment for the utilisation of the knowledge. The conference method, therefore, is intellectually productive and capable of improving the teaching and learning of written composition.

6. Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

- Teachers of English Language should be exposed to seminars and workshops where modern methods of teaching writing are taught.
- English Language teachers should teach specific writing skills at a time to enable students learn such skills effectively.

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