

ASSESSMENT OF WRITTEN ENGLISH ESSAY USING THE ESSAY ANALYTICAL SCORING PROFILE WITHIN THE GUIDED WRITING STRATEGY AMONG JSS STUDENTS IN KADUNA STATE

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of written English essay using the essay analytical scoring profile (EASP) within the guided writing strategy among junior secondary school students in Kaduna state. Quasi experimental research design involving two groups (one experimental and control) was used. The population of the study comprised of JSS 2 students of public Junior Secondary Schools in Zaria Educational Zone of Kaduna State, Nigeria. Two (2) coeducation schools were selected by the simple random sampling method. The sample for the study comprised of 132 students from two intact classes selected via the simple random sampling technique from the JSS2 arm in the respective schools. One validated instrument: English Essay Performance Test (EEPT) with reliability coefficient of 0.78 was used to collect data. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested using descriptive statistics and t-test at $P \leq 0.05$ level of significance by the aid of the computer software Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23). The results obtained showed a significant difference in written English performance with respect to EASP (content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanical accuracy) where students exposed to the Guided Writing Strategy (GWS) outperformed the conventional method (CM) group. Based on the findings, it was recommended that teachers should employ the use of GWS in the teaching of written English among the JSS students to enhance their writing skills, ability and competence.

Keywords: Assessment, Written English Essay, Guided Writing Strategy, Essay Analytical Scoring Profile

Introduction

In language pedagogy, writing is very important and complements the other skills of listening, speaking and reading that a learner of a language is expected to be proficient at. Writing is a complex language activity that incorporates thought processes, feelings, and social interactions. Adegbile and Alabi (2007), asserted that writing is the ability to tell or retell pieces of information in the form of narrative, descriptive, expository and argumentative texts. Napitupulu and Ernidawati (2015) described writing as a powerful tool that facilitates one's ability to organize overwhelming events and make them manageable; it is also a form of thinking using written word.

Writing in English language is an aspect of the language that is taught in schools at all levels of education. It is expected that by middle and high school years, students should possess a level of writing skill and competence that will help them express their complex thoughts and understanding of critical information (Graham & Perin, 2007; Ruiz-Funes, 2015). In addition, students are expected to be proficient at writing to be able to communicate daily, articulate ideas and synthesize perspectives in a persuasive manner that is independent of time and space constraints (Olaofe, 2013; Hann, Timmis, Alkhadi, Davis, Troncoso & Yi, 2014).

It is no longer news that students of English language struggle with writing at all level of education in Nigeria (Komalafe & Yara, 2010; Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013). This is not unconnected to a popular but debatable bias that English is a second language (L2). This generally possess a problem in the learning and acquisition of the language especially in writing. This problem according to Akujobi and Chukwu (2012) is unequivocally placed at the door step of teachers of English who unfortunately utilizes the conventional method of teaching to teach written English in secondary schools especially at the Junior secondary level.

The JSS level is a level of education where foundational English language acquired from elementary school is built upon. At the end of the period, students are expected to write the Junior School Certificate Examination and be certified. However, reports show that students are weak at writing and consequently perform poorly in the language (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013). The teaching of writing using the conventional method has not produce the desired competence in students at JS level (Timayi, 2016). A strategy noted for improving students' performance in written English is the guided writing strategy (Oczkus, 2007; Bachtiar & Sagala, 2012). Guided writing offers great opportunity for writers to make valuable connections between text, sentence and word level decisions. It also helps students shape and redraft texts with particular criteria in mind. The strategy gives room to the teacher to guide a whole-class lesson, invite learner volunteer to read their write ups and identify struggling writers who need extra help for timely intervention (Holdich & Chung, 2003; Oczkus, 2007).

Guided writing Strategy (GWS) has been observed to be very effective at improving student's achievement in writing. This is because it involves using small group which is an opportunity to stretch and expand the writing skills of gifted students, to re-teach key writing skills for struggling students, and to demonstrate an informational text feature a group of students would find helpful in their content writing (Bachtiar & Sagala, 2012; Hoyt, 2015). The teacher ensures that learners follow the rule of grammar (capitalization, punctuation, spelling rules, and creation of complete sentences with relevant details). This guidance provides the building blocks for becoming an efficient independent writer (Wise, 2014).

The guided writing strategy can be explained by the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978). The teacher or peer who is the more knowledgeable shares knowledge with the learners/ peer to bridge the gap between what is known and what is not known. Consequently, novice writers through the guided writing strategy are helped to develop skills and concepts more readily through guidance and scaffolding. This is because when learners expand their knowledge, the actual development level gets increased and the ZPD shifts upward. This implies that the ZPD is ever changing as learners validate and extend their knowledge; a process Vygotsky commented on saying through others, we become ourselves. Liu (2012) opined that the ZPD can be viewed as the difference between what a child can do independently and what he or she is capable of doing with targeted assistance (scaffolding).

This study is interested in assessing the written English essay performance in terms of content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanical accuracy of junior secondary students using guided writing strategy. To achieve this, the essay analytical scoring profile (EASP) proposed by Jacob *et al* (1981) which is a standard instrument was used.

Statement of the Problem

Writing skill, whether essays, letters and other forms of compositions are aspects of the JSS English studies that students are expected to be proficient at. However, reports show that student are weak at it and consequently perform poorly in the language (Muodumogu & Unwaha, 2013). Proficiency in

English language skills especially in writing in today's dynamic society is a key to the world's proof of knowledge and universal culture and a gateway to success in the global economy (Carl, 2003).

Factors such as inadequate teaching and learning materials, teaching methodology, the school system, apprehension and anxiety for writing among others are often indicted for students' poor performance in English language. Teachers generally, teach writing in the language using the conventional approach which has not helped much. Consequently, there is a need to try other approaches such as the guided writing strategy to remedy the situation and enhance English language pedagogy.

Objective

The objective of the study is as follows:

To determine the performance (content, organisation, vocabulary, language use and mechanical accuracy) of Junior Secondary School Students in written English exposed to the guided writing strategy.

Based on the purpose of the study, the following research questions were posed to guide the study

- i. What is the difference between the mean performance (content) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?
- ii. What is the difference between the mean performance (organization) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?
- iii. What is the difference between the mean performance (vocabulary) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?
- iv. What is the difference between the mean performance (language use) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?
- v. What is the difference between the mean performance (mechanical accuracy) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Also the following null hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the mean performance (content) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the mean performance (organization) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant difference between the mean performance (vocabulary) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.
- H₀₄:** There is no significant difference between the mean performance (language use) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.
- H₀₅:** There is no significant difference between the mean performance (mechanical accuracy) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.

Research Methodology

The research is quantitative inclined with a quasi-experimental designed non-randomized group approach. The design had two-groups, one tagged 'experimental' and the other 'control'. Both groups were pretested before the administration of treatment for uniformity and equivalence in performance. The Experimental group was taught using Guided Writing Strategy (GWS) while students in the control group were taught using the conventional method. A Posttest was administered after treatment to both group of students to determine their comparative performance in written English Essay.

One hundred and thirty-two (132) JS two students from two public junior schools in Zaria Educational Zone participated in the study. One validated (by experts in the area of Teaching English as Second Language) instrument: English Essay Performance Test (EEPT) was used to collect data. EEPT was subjected to test-retest reliability technique and was found to have a rho value of 0.78 when correlated using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. EEPT comprised four essay questions from which students answered any two of their choice for 100 marks. Also, EEPT was judged by the use of Essay Analytical Scoring Profile (EASP) adopted from Jacob et al, (1981). EASP consists of five sections: 'content', 'organization', 'vocabulary', 'language use' and 'mechanics' used in essays. These sections were scored 30, 25, 20, 20 and 5 marks respectively which gives a total of 100 marks. EEPT was analyzed using the t-test statistics at $P \leq 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

The research questions and the corresponding hypotheses were answered and tested using together. The results are presented pairwise as follows:

Research Question 1

What is the difference between the mean performance (content) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference between the mean performance (content) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.

Table 1: Summary of Independent t-test for Performance (content) between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	67	16.16	3.20				
				130	11.43	0.001*	Reject H_{01}
Control	65	9.71	3.29				

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

The independent sample t-test in Table 1 showed that the difference in test score between the experimental ($n = 67$, $M = 16.16$, $SD = 3.20$) and control group ($n = 65$, $M = 9.71$, $SD = 3.29$) is statistically significant ($t = 11.43$, $p = 0.001$) at $P \leq 0.05$. Hence, null hypothesis one (H_{01}) was rejected. This means that there is a significant difference between written English performance (content) of the experimental and control groups.

Research Question 2

Is there any difference between the mean performance (organisation) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the mean performance (organisation) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.

Table 2: Summary of Independent t-test for Performance (organisation) between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	67	13.58	2.64				
				130	11.34	0.001*	Reject H ₀₂
Control	65	8.22	2.80				

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

From Table 2, the independent sample t-test revealed that the difference between the experimental ($n = 67$, $M = 13.58$, $SD = 2.64$) and control group ($n = 65$, $M = 8.22$, $SD = 2.80$) is statistically significant ($t = 11.34$, $p = 0.001$) at $P \leq 0.05$. This implies that there is a significant difference between written English performance (organisation) of the experimental and control groups. The result therefore showed with the Guided Writing Strategy, students' writing is better organized.

Research Question 3

What is the difference between the mean performance (vocabulary) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Null Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between the mean performance (vocabulary) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method.

Table 3: Summary of Independent t-test for Performance (vocabulary) between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	67	10.72	2.17				
				130	11.23	0.001*	Reject H ₀₃
Control	65	6.42	2.23				

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

From Table 3, the respective mean score for the experimental group ($n = 67$, $M = 10.72$, $SD = 2.17$) and control group ($n = 65$, $M = 6.42$, $SD = 2.23$) is statistically significant ($t = 11.23$, $p = 0.001$) at $P \leq 0.05$. Hence, the null hypothesis three (H₀₃) is rejected. This means that there was a significant differ-

ence between written English performance (organisation) of the experimental and control groups. The result therefore showed that the GWS is more effective than CM in improving the organisation skill of students writing.

Research Question 4

What is the difference between the mean performance (language use) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Null Hypothesis 4

There is no significant difference between the mean performance (language use) scores of students taught written English by the guided writing strategy and those taught by the conventional method.

Table 4: Summary of Independent t-test for Performance (Language use) between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	67	10.72	2.17				
				130	11.23	0.001*	Reject H ₀₄
Control	65	6.42	2.23				

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

Table 4 revealed the experimental group ($n = 67$, $M = 10.72$, $SD = 2.17$) and control group ($n = 65$, $M = 6.42$, $SD = 2.23$) is statistically significant ($t = 11.23$, $p = 0.001$) at $P \leq 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis four (**H₀₄**) is hereby rejected.

Research Question 5

What is the difference between the mean performance (Mechanical accuracy) scores of students taught written English using the guided writing strategy and those taught using the conventional method?

Null Hypothesis 5

There is no significant difference between the mean performance (Mechanical accuracy) scores of students taught written English by the guided writing strategy and those taught by the conventional method.

Table 5: Summary of Independent t-test for Performance (Mechanical Accuracy) between Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	67	2.81	0.58				
				130	9.62	0.001*	Reject H ₀₅
Control	65	1.80	0.62				

*Significant at $P \leq 0.05$

From Table 5, it was observed that the experimental group ($n = 67$, $M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.58$) and control group ($n = 65$, $M = 1.80$, $SD = 0.62$) is statistically significant ($t = 9.62$, $p = 0.001$) at $P \leq 0.05$. Hence,

null hypothesis five (H_{05}) is hereby rejected. This means that there was a significant difference between written English performance (mechanical accuracy) of the experimental and control groups.

Discussion of Findings

From the results (Tables 1 – 5), it was clear that students taught written English using the GWS performed better than those taught using the CM in terms of content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanical accuracy. This confirms the finding of Oczkus (2007), Bachtar & Sagala (2012), Handayani et al (2013) and Napitupulu & Erniduwati (2015) who observed that the guided writing strategy is effective in the teaching of written English in secondary schools. The reason for the performance can be attributed to the atmosphere enabled by the GWS for scaffolding and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Moreover, Saberi and Rahimi (2013) observed that the GWS helps students' ability in paragraphs development which is essential in independent writing.

Conclusion

The GWS is an effective classroom friendly approach of teaching written English in secondary schools. GWS environment enables and motivates students to benefit from ZPD and scaffolding. The study showed that students exposed to it performed better in content, organization, vocabulary, language use and mechanical accuracy in essay compositions. It was also observed that GWS builds students' confidence in writing in English language. The findings of this study will hopefully help Nigerian Junior Secondary School Students' challenge of poor writing skills and writing apprehension when utilized accordingly.

Recommendations

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

1. Teachers should employ the GWS in the teaching of writing in English at the JSS level to enhance students' performance in written English. This will help the JSS students develop confidence in written English needed in every area of their lives.
2. Workshops and seminars on how to teach writing using the GWS should be organized by the Ministry of Education for each Educational Zone of Kaduna State.
3. Curriculum planners such as Ministry of Education should officially make guided writing a valid method for teaching and learning of written English at the JSS level.

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