



Process and product method of teaching essay writing and students' ability to generate ideas for topics in public secondary schools in port Harcourt and Oyibo local government areas of rivers state

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Abstract

The study examined the effect of process and product methods of teaching essay writing on students' ability to generate ideas for topics in Senior Secondary Schools in Port Harcourt and Oyibo Local Government Areas of Rivers State. A pretest-posttest non-random and control group design was used for the study. 6706 Senior Secondary School (male and females) constituted the population of the study. 149 Senior Secondary Students from the four intact classes in the sampled schools were sampled for the study. An Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) developed by the researcher was the main instrument used for the study. Descriptive Statistics (Mean and Standard Variation) were used in answering the research questions while the hypotheses were tested with Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) at .05 level of significance. The research findings revealed that students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing does differ significantly using process and product methods; students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing does differ significantly using process and product methods based on gender and location.

Keywords: process and product, essay, writing, ideas, ability

Introduction

Writing is one of the media through which academic performance of the students is assessed. As such, the students' performance in written composition affects their performance in other subjects. The importance attached to efficient writing by examination bodies such as West Africa Examination Council makes it imperative that it has to be taught properly. The importance of acquisition of the English language skills in the economic, political, academic and social life of Nigerians, cannot be overstressed. Besides being the recognized medium of communication in the administration of government and businesses in a multilingual country like Nigeria, English language is the medium of instruction through which learners acquire knowledge and skills at all levels of education. To the average Nigerian, therefore, proficiency in English language skills especially in writing in today's diverse society is the key to the world's proof of knowledge and universal culture (Mgbodile, 2009) and a gateway to success in the global economy (Carl, 2003) ^[2].

However, in spite of the vital roles of the English language, most Nigerian students are unable to acquire proficiency in the skills of the language especially writing. Komolafe and Yara (2010) ^[5] observed that the poor performance of students in English could be connected to their inability to write effectively. This translates to abysmal low performance of students in other subjects in both external and internal examinations. Writing is foundational to success in academics, in the work place and in the global economy. In an increasingly demanding world of literacy, the importance of ensuring students' proficiency in writing can never be overemphasized.

Essay writing in particular is a higher form or level of writing skill, and proficiency in this can only be achieved

when the students are well grounded in composition skill. If students are to improve on their achievement in the English language, essay writing should be thoroughly taught in the schools by the language teachers and given priority attention in English language teaching and learning process. The effectiveness of a piece of writing depends on the method adopted by teachers in eliciting the desirable writing skills needed in accomplishing the task of writing. One of these writing skills needed by the student is the ability to generate ideas for topics.

In order to generate ideas for topics one must be equipped with sources of materials as observed by Ituen (2005) which include: personal experiences, observations, interviews and reading. Personal Experiences deal with one's knowledge of places, people and events and its ideals and feelings associated with them. With such experiences one can bring to bear in any write up different forms of writing thus creating uniqueness, originality and interest. To have such experiences one must have observed well what one sees, hears, tastes and smells, by attaching importance to them so that one turns what he observes into useful materials when writing. With respect to interview, you need the views of others so, information can be sourced for through interviews, written or unwritten and such information should be brought to bear in similar situations in your writing. Good writers have also been identified as good readers. Reading exposes one to varieties of information or knowledge by enabling one to read magazines, newspapers and books in this way one's stock of vocabulary and language usage are increased and invariably this will reflect on one's writing

Ituen (2004) ^[4] posits that there are three elements in generating ideas to topics which include: brainstorming, use of probing questions and free writing. Brainstorming entails

the ability to group students and ask them to rattle their brains to elicit ideas that are already stored in the brain through their personal experiences, observations, interviews and reading which are relevant for a topic. Use of probing questions is a situation that demands the writer to ask questions partaken to a given topic in order to get an in-depth knowledge and appraise the topic. Free writing is a situation that entails a writer to put down ideas that are relevant for a topic. It is a continuous pouring of ideas on paper by the writer without minding the language in use so that ideas can flow. In other to develop this skill, the methodology used by the teacher is important.

Ituen (2004) ^[4] posited that the methodology adopted by a large number of our teachers falls far below the appropriate skills associated with good writing. Thus, the author emphasized that the process method is one which is built in stages and must be taught consciously and systematically.

The process approach emphasized the view of writing as a process of developing, organization as well as meaning (Matsuda, 2003) ^[7]. According to Brown and Hood (2009), the basic stages of writing as a process are: planning, drafting, and revising.

On the other hand, the product approach or the text-based approach emphasizes the form. A great deal of effort is given to the description of structural rules of texts. Developing writing in the product approach focuses on the formal features of texts. From this perspective the piece of writing is independent from their context and writer's personal experience can be understood by any one, since all writers and readers share the same practice, so they have the same interpretations and understanding (Hyland, 2002) ^[3]. The product method provides students with a limited experience due to the range of narrow topics given to students to write on, as a result, it does not seek to discover students' interest thereby limiting teacher's knowledge in knowing much about the students. Lack of knowledge about the students is a great handicap as observed by Shaughnessy (1988).

Eze (2013), in a study stressed that the current pedagogical approach to writing which is the product method that comprises controlled, guided and free writing is ineffective in presenting the standard of writing demanded of students. The process method through prewriting, writing and rewriting which encourages students to generate ideas, structure these ideas coherently and cohesively thereby constructing appropriate language structure through drafting and redrafting, shift between rehearsals, revisions and editing is not given attention by teachers in the teaching situation. Maduekwe (2007) ^[6] also added that writing is hardly taught and when taught it is taught as a product and not as a process; teachers test rather than train students to write. Besides, students' comprehension levels through comprehension passages have not been employed adequately to assist them in acquiring writing skills needed in accomplishing the task of writing. Thus, their organizational competence is low, their ideas are most times not appropriate to the topics, the degree of their mechanical error is very high and their stock of vocabulary inadequate for the standards of expression demanded of them in writing. As a result of these, students lack originality and creativity of ideas, thought and knowledge of the subject matter. Gender is an important variable that affects learning and research has established that there is a significant positive correlation between students' gender and

performance in academic domain (Mudumogu & Unwaha, 2013) ^[9]. In the language arts for instance, girls are reported to be more favoured than boys. Olajide (2013) ^[11] observes that boys are superior in numerical aptitude, science, reasoning and spatial relationship, while girls are superior in verbal fluency, perceptual speed, memory and manual dexterity. On the other hand, some researchers suggest that females have an edge over males in linguistic aptitude, whereas others are of the view that because of the biological differences in males and females, the females perceive themselves as not able to do well in writing (Okoye, 2009). The location of a school has a big role to play on the educational performance of students in the school. Immediate environment of a child plays a major role in the socialization of such a child. Therefore, the area in which a school is located can affect the educational achievement of a student. It is against this background the study intends to examine the effect of process and product method of teaching essay writing and students' ability to generate ideas for topics in public secondary schools in Port Harcourt and Oyiibo Local Government Areas of Rivers State.

Statement of the problem

The role of writing in the life of an average person is enormous yet the performance of students in this very important area is disheartening. Writing is one language skill that requires patience on the part of the teacher to put the learner through. It is not a skill that can be acquired without painstaking effort. This explains why someone can learn to speak a language by interacting with members of that linguistic community, but can never learn to write such a language without formal tutoring. It is a language skill that requires a whole lot of effort and skill on the part of the teacher before the desired result could be achieved.

Rather than follow the students on a step by step journey through writing, what is seen in our secondary schools is a whitewash approach whereby the teacher in the bid to cover the syllabus introduces topics and leaves the students to figure out what to do. At best, they are given models to follow in their writing without actually helping them develop their intellect on the topic, brainstorming on such topics and moving from one stage of the writing to the next in a gradual pace until something beautiful emerges.

The teacher as well as the student must awake to new approaches. What if we use this method in which the teacher flows along with the students from brainstorming through the writing stage and up to the rewriting stage. That perhaps could be an answer to the teething problem of poor writing skill among students in Rivers State, hence, the need for this research.

Research question

The following research questions guided the study;

1. How does students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ using process and product methods?
2. How does students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ using process and product methods based on gender and location?

Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses study were formulated for and tested at 0.05; level of significance

1. Students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay

- writing does not differ significantly based on process and product methods of teaching.
- Students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing does not differ significantly using process and product methods of teaching based on gender and location.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is a quasi-experimental non-randomized pretest, post-test control group design. 6706 Senior Secondary School 2 (SS2) English Language students comprising 4348 males and 2358 females in the 12 public secondary schools in Port Harcourt and four public secondary schools in Oyibo Local Government Areas constituted the population of the study. The 2018/2019 academic session constituted the population (Rivers State Post Primary School Board, 2019). 149 SS2 English Language students in the 4 secondary schools both in Port Harcourt and Oyibo Local Government Areas of Rivers State constituted the sample size for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select two schools in each Local Government Area. The selected schools in each Local Government Area were randomly assigned to experimental and control conditions using just one arm of intact class in the selected schools. The instrument for data collection titled “Essay Writing Achievement Test” (EWAT) consisted of past WAEC essay writing questions. These were six essay questions structurally arranged to cover those topics captured by the syllabus. The instrument has been standardized and is employed by teachers of English for grading school certificate examinations and general certificate ordinary level examinations. Furthermore, six lesson plans developed by the researcher that focused on the guideline on which the treatment was administered were also employed for the study. WAEC standard marking scheme was used for marking of the students’ pre-test and post-test scripts and were classified under the following; content, organisation, expression and mechanical accuracy. These measured students’ ability to generate ideas for topics, students’ organizational pattern, students’ syntactic competence and students’ expressive skills. The instrument EWAT was given to three experienced English Language Lecturers in the University of Uyo for expert inputs. Their constructive criticism, corrections and comments was used to modify the instrument to meet the expected standard both in face and content validity. The research instrument for the study, Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT) was trial tested with twenty (20) students which were randomly selected from public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, who were not part of the main study. The test – retest method of an interval of two weeks was employed in establishing the reliability of the instrument. To calculate the reliability of the Essay Writing Achievement Test (EWAT), the cronbach alpha was used to measure the internal consistency since it was not a multiple choice question. The reliability coefficient (r) was 0.83.

The collection of data was systematically organized in three different phases; Pre-treatment phase, Treatment phase and Post – treatment phase.

Pre-Treatment Phase

The intention of the researcher was made known to both the school management, English Language teachers and the

students of the selected schools involved in the study. This was done to obtain their maximum support so as to carry out the research procedures. After the familiarization process, a special training was organized for research assistants who used the Process method. The researcher used two days to train these assistants. One day was used for each Local Government Area. Since the teachers were not used to the Process approach, the researcher took time to explain the lesson plans on the Process method, explaining each stage of the process. After the training, EWAT was distributed to all the students both in the experimental and control group as pretest. After the test, their scripts were collected for analysis. This was to obtain their baseline knowledge before the treatment.

Treatment Phase

The treatment phase involved the teaching session for both the experimental and control groups. The experimental groups were taught writing composition concept using the process method while the control groups were taught the same concept using the product method. Three periods per week of 40 minutes/per period for six weeks were used for both the experimental groups and the control groups. The treatment procedure lasted for six weeks and immediately after the treatment phase, the post treatment phase commenced.

Post-Treatment Phase

Post treatment phase involved collection of scripts, scoring and analysis of data.

Method of data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using the descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while the inferential statistics of Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test for the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result of findings

Research Question one

How does students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ using process and product methods?

Table 1: Mean and SD scores of students on pre-test and post-test classified by their treatment

Treatment Group	Sample Size	Pre-test \bar{X} SD		Post-test \bar{X} SD		Mean Difference
Product Method (Control)	73	12.27	5.66	22.57	18.24	10.3
Process Method (Experimental)	76	24.69	18.75	45.72	24.14	21.03

In answer to the research question 1, the pre-test, post-test mean difference of 10.3 and 21.03 for the students in product and process method group respectively, displayed in Table 1 shows that students taught ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing with process method performed better than those taught using product method.

Research Question two

How does students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ using process and product methods based on gender and location?

Table 2: Mean and SD score of students on pre-test and post-test score for student ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing based on gender and location

Treatment Group	Location	Gender	Sample	Pre-test X̄ SD		Post-test X̄ SD		Mean Difference
Process (Experimental)	Urban	Male	24	14.62	5.77	6.50	10.21	8.12
		Female	17	11.17	3.32	34.17	16.09	23
	Rural	Male	14	10.14	5.27	29.28	17.30	19.14
		Female	18	11.83	6.78	27.83	17.91	16
Product (Control)	Urban	Male	21	29.09	20.64	27.61	15.13	1.48
		Female	27	17.44	15.04	52.22	22.41	34.78
	Rural	Male	10	28.00	17.51	40.50	24.43	12
		Female	18	28.61	20.27	60.00	22.68	31.39

To answer the research question, the pre – test, post-test mean difference of 8.12 and 23.00 for male and female students respectively in the urban location and 19.14 and 16.00 for the process group. This reveals that female students taught ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing using the process method in the urban location performed better while their male counterparts in the rural location performed better. For the product group, the pretest-posttest mean difference of 1.48 and 34.78 for male and female students respectively in the urban location and

12.00 and 31.39 for the male and female students respectively in the rural location were obtained. This reveals that female student taught ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing performed better than their female counterpart in both rural and urban locations.

Hypothesis one

Students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing do not differ significantly using process and product methods.

Table 3: Summary of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of students’ post-test scores in essay writing classified by treatment groups and learning style with pre-test as covariate.

Source of Variation	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Crit.	Decision at p<.05
Pre GI	28.43	1	28.43	6.35	3.94	S
Treatment	22.47	1	22.47	50.08	3.94	S
Error	66.59	146	45.53			
Total	26.00	149				
Corrected Total	89.19	148				

The result in Table 3 shows that, the calculated F-ratio for the students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing at df 1 and 146 is 50.08, while its corresponding calculated level of significance is. 000 alpha. The F-cal, 50.08 is greater than the F-crit, 3.94, at. 05 alpha, indicating that the method used had a statistical significant effect on students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing when using process and product methods. Therefore, the null hypothesis that students’ ability to generate ideas for

topics in essay writing do not differ significantly using process and product methods is rejected. The result means that the treatment has a significant effect on students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing.

Hypothesis two

Students’ ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing do not differ significantly using process and product methods based on gender and location.

Table 4: Summary of analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) of students’ post-test scores in essay writing classified by treatment groups and learning style with pre-test as covariate.

Source of variation	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F-cal	F-Crit.	Decision n at <.05
Pre GI	12.63	1	12.63	3.63	3.94	ns
Treatment	15.72	1	15.72	45.94	3.94	s
Gender	96.23	1	96.23	29.04	3.94	s
Location	31.35	1	31.35	9.49	3.94	s
Treatment*	53.15	1	53.15	1.61	3.94	ns
Gender						
Treatment*	10.92	1	10.92	.328	3.94	ns
Location						
Gender*	19.69	1	19.69	5.85	3.94	s
Location						
Treatment*	13.24	1	13.24	4.18	3.94	s
Gender*						
Location						
Error	46.30	140	33.86			
Total	26.00	149				
Corrected Total	89.19	148				

The result in Table 4 shows that, the calculated F-ratio for difference in students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing at df 1 and 140 is 4.18, while its corresponding calculated level of significance is. 043 alpha. The F-cal, 4.18 is greater than the F-crit, 3.94, at .05 alpha, indicating that the methods (process and product) used have a statistical significant effect on students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing based on gender and location. Therefore, the null hypothesis that students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing do not differ significantly using process and product methods based on gender and location is rejected. The result means that the treatment, gender and location have an interactive effect on students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing.

Discussion of findings

The result in table 3 shows that the calculated F- ratio (50.08) for students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing is greater than the F - crit (3.94) at 1 and 140 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This implies that students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ significantly using the process and product methods. The result indicates that the process method group had a higher mean score than the product method group. The result is attributed to the fact that the use of brainstorming, clustering, interactions, rapid free writing and questioning, which are the highlights of the pre-writing stage in the process method has a positive impact on students' ability to generate ideas for topics. A positive reason for the better performance of the process group could be explained by the fact that the painstaking strategy of brainstorming on the topic, clustering and rapid free writing sharpen the students' intellect, enabling them to generate good ideas for the topic in question. This is in line with the findings of Cankaystar and Yasar (2009) whose experimental study on that efficiency of the writing process approach showed that students in the process method make significant progress in their writing skills.

Another possible reason for the better performance of the process method group could be as explained by Connie (2007) that making students understand the process of writing produces better result in them than making them imitate finished models.

The result in table 4 shows that the calculated F – ratio (4.18) for difference in students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing at 1 and 140 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. This implies that students' ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing differ significantly using process and product method based on gender and location. The result indicates that female students in the urban location did better than their male colleagues using the process method whereas the male students in the rural location did better than their female counterparts. Using the product method, the female student outshine their male colleagues both in the urban and the rural location. This could be so because the process approach holds a ray of hope for male students in the rural location. This could be because this approach helps to that part of the male brain that is responsible for language product. In most rural areas, the English Language may not be the predominant means of communication and this could have a means of rendering the capacity of students in the rural location from doing well in language arts. This outcome seems to support the views of Kimyra (2009) who

states that the part of the brain responsible for processing verbal information and permitting the exchange of information between hemispheres were more highly developed in girls. However, in the findings of Cambell *et al.* (2007), girls and boys are found to perform equally well if instructional context is fair and conducive. This explains why the boys in rural location performs even better than their female group then the process method was used to teach ability to generate ideas for topics in essay writing.

Conclusion

Teachers over – reliance on the product method in essay writing which is currently in use by most teachers in secondary schools is ineffective because this method does not enhance students' academic performance. It makes the student over dependent on finished models. So English Language teachers can make use of the process method to enhance students' essay writing. Moreover, teachers should use brainstorming, interactions and questioning to incorporate ability to generate ideas in essay writing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward for adoption:

1. English Language teachers are advised to employ the process approach to essay writing because its major benefit seems to be that it treats specific writing difficulties. The specific activities of the process approach impact significantly on the learners.
2. At any step of the writing process, students can talk about their products and exchange their ideas, give feedbacks and comments, and then in the end, they can present their product orally, which is regarded as an important part of communication activities.

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